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The Red Badge of Courage

By **Stephen Crane**

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definitely. The scheme is a trifle too logical, too methodic. It is not ecstatic, it is not extravagant; nay, its very coolness and deliberation seem studied and articulate. It is wholly cold-blooded. But it is a gallant endeavour, and in truth and beyond question a very singular performance. Not the least of Mr. Crane's gifts is that this narrative, with scarce a name to hang upon a single character, and no plot whatsoever, holds one irrevocably. There is no possibility of resistance, when once you are in its grip, from the first march of the troops to the closing scenes. The hero is the 'youth.' His comrades call him Henry, but to Mr. Crane and the reader he remains the 'youth.' He goes into battle a coward; he is among the deserters on the first day of fighting; he comes out of the three days' campaign with the red badge."

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Contents

	PAGE
I. AT SAFINGTON PARK	I
II. THE "SONG BIRDS"	29
III. SUBURBAN ANTIPODES	58
IV. COMPENSATION	72
V. VARIATIONS	88
VI. A TOUR DE FORCE	104
VII. ACCIDENTALS.	120
VIII. HARMONICS	134

Papier Mâché

I

AT SAFINGTON PARK

A BEAUTIFUL place strictly locked up. No eyes save the owner's and those of his few acquaintances ever penetrated to the park glades, lawns, parterres, or glass-houses. To all intents and purposes the deer frisked unadmired; elms, oaks, and beeches spread themselves wide across turf and bracken, angling for appreciation in barren waters, whilst colours and scents made the garden rich with wealth that no one wanted. Even on company days, for the noble guests brought with them no force of contrast, no sharp-set appetite for wonder, no exuberance of holiday-making even, these every-day objects could awaken nothing in them but cool comparisons set in a rayless halo of duty balanced to date. What Sir Peter Parkley had accepted

at their hands they were bound to accept at his, and decorate his table with faces as the gardener decorated it with flowers.

As for Sir Peter himself, he avowedly cared no more for his ancestral home than he did for the utter strangers who would gladly have supplied it with admiration. Neither, truth to confess, did he care much for county neighbours tacked to him by a question of reciprocity. His hospitalities were forced, and his show of interest matched well with the show of costly exotics over which it was periodically unfurled; for had any person present ventured to raise the one topic really indigenous to the head of the table, Sir Peter himself must have been the first to take offence.

Through this we may read, beneath all the gilding of his circumstances, that Sir Peter was nevertheless their victim.

He had been a younger son and a celebrated physician, devoted to his profession, idolising his profession. Arms, Law, and Church he had laughed to scorn when compared with the allurements of physic; for where would you find such interest, such active progression—in the barracks, or the law-court? Even in matters of life or death the bench was mere wood beside points of law discussed with Nature herself.

Dr. Parkley, in those days, was an enthusiast. Then his elder brother, the representative of family honours and selfishness, left him the title, and Safington, the representative of family embarrassments. As Dr. Parkley, the new head of the family had been a very thriving man, but as Sir Peter he was a miserably poor one. Besides—*Sir Peter!*—the last link of a long chain of faces who glumly inhabited their walls—how could Sir Peter retain his practice in one hand when that chain was riveted to the other! A rolling mountain of incongruity broke over him, deluging him with disgust that chilled all his medical ardour. In spite of heroic efforts Sir Peter proved too strong for Dr. Parkley, who, moreover, had the dissatisfaction of finding all his emoluments swallowed up by Safington without the slightest diminution of its appetite.

No labour can be glorious that is harnessed to a bugbear, especially one that has a hundred years of starvation to make up for. Sir Peter threw down his practice, closed his house violently, took what there was to be taken, gave nothing in return, and retired beyond reach of outcries—to Italy. There he flounced down in the sulks to wait; nothing more transpired, no relief of occupation save the bare one of living on the reluctant squeezings of Safington; he

vegetated—the word looks peaceful on paper, but ask the valet to furnish a simile for the skies of Southern Europe and in all human probability he would instance lead. Those were dreary years indeed, years of lingering, years of boredom, each stretched over many thousand hours of ungilded idleness, as many futile attempts to kill time without powder or shot.

Everything comes to him that waits, they say, ammunition not excepted; it would seem equally true that everything *goes*. Sir Peter became rich; he could have opened a pecuniary cannonade of the very briskest description, but no longer cared to do so. Hours so golden died like so many swans; mellifluous and uneventful, they were rather to be retarded than driven by life among roses that had only one trifling thorn of a stipulation.

Only one little thorn, but even a rose leaf proved annoying to the Princess of Sybarites in the fairy tale; and on company days this thorn became specially rampant. The presence of medical topics that were tabooed made considerate guests fall back for safety's sake upon the one other conversational presence always in waiting—this thorn, this notorious stipulation of opulence—the Druish Violin.

Nobody cared a pin about its voice, though

Sir Peter was wont to complain that he moved to perpetual fiddling. One of the best of the Cremonas, intrinsic merits were lost in fortuitous surroundings, and everybody descanted upon the fact that it had saved a rich man's life, and was made the pivot of his fortune.

The late owner had been a maternal uncle of Sir Peter's, and as enthusiastic in collecting stringed instruments as Dr. Parkley ever was in his profession. Another point of resemblance might be found in the fact that he had lived and died a thoroughly selfish old bachelor, lying with his collection on velvet from year's end to year's end without a sign of utility or purpose.

Now the predominating incident in the history of the Druish violin has not only swallowed up all other incidents and interests connected with the violin itself, but a train of other instruments that constitute the balance of the collection. Some of them are almost as valuable intrinsically, but the whole forms only a satellite of this particular instrument, or rather of the predominating incident which it represents. The maternal uncle's will has tended to promote this metaphor, for there the incident and its representative are paramount. Sir Peter and Safington are chosen as the fittest accessories of

so exalted a fiddle, and many annual thousands go to support its dignity—clearly, for should the fiddle be lost the money is forfeit to charity. In that case poor Sir Peter would have to console himself with the balance of the collection, which is merely commended to his guardianship without restrictions, together with a boy, Paul Druish, in whose favour there is a small life-charge upon the estate.

As the pivot of fortune we may easily imagine that the fiddle is an object of extraordinary solicitude. Fire-proof walls, patent locks, and electrical appliances have been lavished round it until even the mind's eye cannot without difficulty catch sight of the instrument itself.

One morning, shortly before Christmas, about five years after the maternal uncle's death, Sir Peter was expecting the return of his young kinsman, Paul Druish, for the last time from school. Outside was a white world, virgin snow newly fallen, as delicate and pure as the wing of a white moth, or the bloom on an unhandled cluster of grapes. Late hanging veils of mist were drawing back to let a gleam of frosty sunshine fall on the handiwork of fairy fingers that had been growing up behind them. Every twig and every green leaf was encrusted with jewels—jewels that left no trace of the

sober brown boughs; each tree was a living crystal, each crystal a glitter, sparkling in the festive foliage of winter, indescribably beautiful and pathetically evanescent. It was a sight to be drunk in hurriedly with eager eyes, and committed gratefully to heart as a treasure. Sir Peter did not think so, however. He could not see much, the windows were too high; but his one keen glance at the little they commanded reflected nothing but fogs and humid atmosphere. Then he shot one glance at the fire and one at his book, but instead of mending that or lifting this—

“Thank Heaven!” he piously thought, “I am *not* rheumatic.”

The fire was burning in a closed stove, and the book lying face downwards upon the table. It was pleasant sometimes to feel an inclination to read, although, as a rule, studies went no further.

“Um!” said Sir Peter. “Really, really. No. Not rheumatic.”

The room walls were of stone smoothed with plaster and painted in panels, with tit-bits from Safington itself: the house from various aspects, garden-alleys, and nooks of the park. Sir Peter would wave his hand to these, when showing visitors round, and blandly ask, “Why travel?”

Alternating with the views on the outer walls were several slits of windows, very high and very narrow, while half the height of the inner wall and about two-thirds of its length were monopolised by a massive, plate-glass fronted case, hung with ample curtains of deep purple velvet, very rich and very heavy. "My aviary," Sir Peter would say, waving to this in humorous allusion to the rare instruments it contained.

The floor was of mosaic, a curious indiscriminate jumbling of all the colours of the rainbow, originally intended, perhaps, to symbolise the earth with its flowers and foliage. As the result was not significant of this design, Sir Peter had smothered it up with skins and mats, lightly waiving the little bits that remained uncovered as blind man's mosaic, a sort of microlithic *pie*.

The roof was most ingeniously frosted with an efflorescence of stars upon a dark blue ground, from the centre of which a great electrical moon, when luminous, refracted dazzling sparks on all sides. And bating a few articles of furniture and the fuel on the fire, nothing in that room was inflammable,—iron and stone, the crown jewels could not be more mightily protected.

A long line of wheel ruts and hoof marks has been silently printing the virgin snow across the park; now a carriage appears gliding swiftly

towards the house, with a boyish head and shoulders protruding first from one window and then from the other in admiration of the trees; a burst of hilarity passes through grave domestics in the hall, and presently Paul Druish stands before his noble kinsman, doing his best to look respectfully composed.

"You are well," says Sir Peter, after shooting his one keen glance—his voice is still reminiscent of professional weights and measures—"very well, I need not ask; I, too, am—not rheumatic. Sit down, Paul."

Paul has a great deal to say, but he sits down obediently, reserving all chatter for the ears of the butler and coachman. He is there to hear, not to be heard, obviously, for Sir Peter also has a great deal to say upon this occasion—once for all, to use his favourite phrase.

Paul is now seventeen, he has left school, and next year must go to college, and in the interim read with "our rector"—and so on. He is fond of dabbling with paints: no harm in that.

"You know my position," pursued Sir Peter, "both with respect to yourself and those more compulsory violins. As you are not compulsory I can, without sense of hardship, pass you as my heir. No thanks; an heir is necessary. Really, one pleasant necessity. Now pull that tassel, please."

The speaker leaned back, surveying his landscaped walls complacently, and repeating to himself, "Yes, quite an agreeable necessity," while the tassel, being pulled, draped back the heavy curtains automatically.

And there they hung, the imprisoned singing birds, violins, tenors, 'cellos, of all ages and patterns, displayed upon amber velvet behind glass inches thick set in steel.

The very noble and dignified showman watched the effect of his *coup* with showmanly condescension which was vocal in the tone of his exordium :

"Beneath the case is a coil of hot-water pipes to obviate the necessity of fires except on very special occasions. The collection is valued at many thousand pounds, and generally admitted to be incomparable."

Paul was staring for the first time in his life at the incomparable collection, one day to be his own, so he fondly thought, not taking the predominance of that incident into consideration.

"There," said Sir Peter, making a little stab with his forefinger, "is our *sine quâ non*, the domineering fetish in whose clutches both we and our successors must be contented to repose."

An iron flange cast solid with the back of the case projected in the centre of the collection.

It was faced with glass immensely thick, and lined with ruby plush of the finest quality, fit setting for the fetish flaunting mute but insolent, eclipsing the very idea of music with its glamour of fortune and romance.

"How do you get them out?" Paul wanted to know, hovering excitedly about the case.

The showman smiled superior, having anticipated the inquiry. Every year he was bound to exhibit his birds in public, and chose the little flower-show at Lockthorpe, with due precautions. Many connoisseurs also called with extraordinary claims upon indulgence. For these tiresome instances a door had been provided in the back of the case, opening by a combination of locks through a burglar-proof safe in the next room.

"Even if charity commissioners could bandy with burglars," said Sir Peter, stroking his long nose lazily, "here I could sit as in an inverted aquarium, watching the sharks traversing the front of yonder tank, unable, clearly unable to get in. But, mark me, boy, if a bonfire should be made of our talisman there, away fly all those birds, yourself *en suite*. Pray let there be no mistake. I must then sit me down alone to husband the proceeds. Ahem! That glass is two inches thick, and there is a night watchman."

"But who plays on them now?" asked Paul, undashed by this dismal possibility of a future.

The words produced a shiver.

Plays! Sir Peter was morally bound to give harbourage to the instruments. By the terms of the bequest he exhibited them and played the showman, but he was under no obligation to hear *them* played.

Here he produced a roll of papers from the table drawer. Suspending the operation of straightening it, he looked up and added—

"Though, mind you, to outsiders that fateful instrument is worth many hundred pounds—in short, priceless. Nobody notices its lines; look at that scar upon the front; diagonally there is one on the back to correspond. You know the story. How it saved your uncle by taking a knife aimed at his life, and all the rest of it? Of course, I wish you now to hear the details, once for all. This was written by a bachelor, as I am. I could have wished that you would follow in our lead—your father's brother, the writer of this manuscript, my elder brother, deceased, and myself. But it is useless. You take after none of us precedents. And that reminds me," mused Sir Peter, suddenly breaking into another key, "there is a girl to beware of at the rectory. They say her father, rather

presumptuously perhaps, prohibits her taking to the stage. I need hardly adjudicate in your case that all professions are closed equally to you and yours. In our circumstances a professional taint would now be—anachronistic. Much safer, then, to do as we do—your uncles on both sides, and myself—ensure one heir than incur the risk of having six or seven. Ah! useless, quite useless. Marriage will be out of the question during my lifetime, this place being so expensive; but you are amatory, hopelessly amatory, I see,” sighed Sir Peter, with gold-rimmed glasses suspended between their resting-place, and his usual one keen glance.

He fixed them, and focused the paper, while the lad hung his head in shame.

“I will read you,” he said, “once for all, the history of the Druish Violin.”

“The wound in the maple has been very skilfully treated, and is now almost imperceptible, but the softer pine through which the knife entered, in spite of its marvellous elasticity of fibre, still bears a scar, or rather a third sound-hole of extreme tenuity. Prince Pizzicato, a king of fiddling amateurs, writes fearing that the tone will be permanently affected, either by undue compression of fibres in the locality of the

stab, or the jarring propinquity of its edges. These musical people (especially foreigners) are dreadfully utilitarian. The prince is as far as ever from grasping the fact that here is no mere question of tone; the significance of the instrument has entirely changed. This is no longer a mere violin, though signed by the greatest of makers and dated from his prime, but a very special instrument of Providence, never more to be subject to use at the hand of man. It was always my favourite specimen, the prize of a lifetime; but the voice uttered by those thin lips in the pine, though mute, is incomparably richer than any drawn from cat-gut and horse-hair. People like the Prince Pizzicato must be infidels; that is how I account for their obtuseness.

“Thirty-five years ago! The life that has attained this green old age would never have done so but for these marks of omniscience. How many triumphs have been added to my list since then, to make it really representative, really National; should I *then* have been obliged to play the Mede and Persian over a rule never to leave this collection for more than one month at any provincial exhibition? We travel about, in constant request, immortalising our name as we go. But great as is the triumph of such

ownership, of the fact that I, George Druish, a man reared in the moleskin of colonial station-life, should have bettered my father's teaching by achieving an European reputation among virtuosi, the equal of Elgin, the superior of Vernon, still I have learnt to feel a gratification at my association with this first, greatest prize, keener even than that which runs away with my pen through all the rest. The others bring worldly pride, but this, like the Holy Rood, has been pierced for me; it speaks of direct Divine interposition between myself and death.

"It was with no intention of recording triumphs that I took up my pen to-night. The mirror shows me a white head, and shoulders, though still hale, stooping; but there is an old familiar feeling in the atmosphere—what is it?—that recalls a well-remembered night thirty-five years ago. Here are the same cosy quarters, a trifle faded; the same instrument cupboard, as bare as then, or barer, for the collection is as usual 'on view;' the same musical family ploughing its devious furrow of misery through the snow; and here before me, separated from that night only by a glass case, lies the self-same instrument with its story on its lips. Thirty-five years ago! the scene is present, shaping itself in language beneath my pen.

“Tired, poor Selgrave has come to the hammer, having failed signally in his rash attempt to pose as a renowned collector. As a friend he requested me to attend the sale, and I promised, going prepared to commiserate with him over the loss of his household gods. Some twenty or thirty instruments, representing an outlay of not more than three thousand pounds, had broken his back. There were they, with their moral of presumption on the part of a family man of moderate income. All the town knows that Selgrave had nothing much. He had retired from business, so had I; but then he had taken a wife, and his wife had poor relations, children too, and no doubt a taste for dress. Whereas in my case were inherited stations, houses, stock, a very ample roll of lucrative effects, all joined to a single state, no relatives whatever whose wants need be recognised, and the craving for a *pose*. In Australia I might have posed as a man of means; not so in England. Moreover, I strongly deprecate the statuesque attitude aiming solely at transmission, intact, to posterity. The idea of progression is indispensable to the maintenance of interest; to be alive we must grow, not simply vegetate.

“Well, then, it follows that a single man of large means and insistent ambition, with no bent

for study, and a liking for the soft half-light of activity that dwells in idea rather than action, turns to collecting as a means of perpetuating his name. To build churches you must die; I wished to live and enjoy notoriety—I have done it, too. Next month the instruments go to London, to a house already prepared, hereafter to be known to the world's connoisseurs as the loadstone of their eyes, the centre of their desires, the seat of the great Druish Collection, wherein are to be found examples of all styles, all makers from first to last. Walk round the case: in the history of stringed instruments you are now learned.

“To return to this state prisoner of my gratitude. Selgrave first showed it me. It had got into his mind, he said. He had run himself up to purchasing it, and traced to it all his subsequent financial involvements. I should have blamed the wife; he blamed the fiddles, especially this one, which was worth any six of the others, and, holding it aloft, he expatiated upon its history.

“An authentic record in direct perspective from your own hands to the maker's is homologous to an authentic genealogy. For this, for nothing else, we pay great sums, and I can proudly assert that among all my purchases there is nothing even remotely hypothetical. All have histories,

and this—this history to which I am paving my way is the king of them all.

“Those branches of virtue which impinge (I say encroach) upon art have attracted a whole host of vulgar aspirants to special knowledge. Distrust of the pocket may try to eke out money with erudition, and of some instances, no doubt, a fatal want of single purpose makes monsters—as if successful men, any more than successful statues, could pose two ways! From hackneyed pictures and charlatan ceramics I had been spared by a firm grasp, on one hand, of my specialities, and on the other, perhaps, by the grasp of innate alienage from study, fostered in a nursery of rough-riding. I had, however, been dabbling with silver-work when poor Selgrave’s glowing narrative burst upon me like a revelation. Here was an answer—here was *the* answer to all my inquiries and reviews. The first conception of this little pinnacle whereon I now sit supreme shook me with bright visions of the future. Not wholly in pride, not wholly from conscious qualifications for succeeding where poor Selgrave had so miserably failed, I determined to buy this instrument, already famous, and found upon it an empire in which it might reign.

“Tired by the day’s emotions involving so grave a change of ends and aims, I was sitting

with my new purchase alone in this room. The house was rather a lonely one then, an old house though standing in a new suburb. One side faced the street with a row of iron railings flush with the doorstep, the other sloped down steeply in a terraced garden towards a prospect of wide meadows, then uninhabited, and in the angle of the hill came my landlady's quarters in a basement from which she had to mount stairs to the front-door. The street was well lighted, and the other side of the way, though less populous than at present, was represented by several rows and detached houses, hence my dining-room that faced the street never felt lonely; the snow-clad meadows, the moonlit winding-sheet of a wintry world, it must have been their presence, felt or reviewed, that has made me associate loneliness with the night in question. It must be so. Would the mere absence of poor Selgrave's encumbrances come home in that way to a man born and bred in an ocean of space! Somebody's encumbrances—Selgrave's, for all I know—were the worst feature of loneliness then, as they are now. The gusts of their alms-grinding chant fell upon me as I raised the dining-room window after dinner, an action made habitual by early training; on one side the world, and hermetical houses on the other.

"I had dined indifferently, very indifferently; I was far too much excited to dine well, or think of loneliness on that night, though there still reached me, tuned in a whole bunch of rusty keys, wafts of the painful strain that has robbed this present hour of its peace.

"I have lived well, fared well, travelled much, and been well received in other circles than those of cognoscenti. The means at command have met with their proper use, neither tense nor flaccid; my life-long pose has been that of a wealthy man distinguished among the class by this collection. Except myself, who can lay anything to my charge? And even from that quarter—the date is so old;—even on the night I speak of it seemed so little to me, the man sitting there, that girls will be fond and boys silly. Now, as the principal cause of my being sent to England, I condone the offence; the Collection, in print and in fact, declares plainly that whatever such men as Selgrave might say, in choosing my father's favour and his fortune I chose for the best. Obedience apart, the last wail of that family of beggars, shorn by the night winds' icy excision to die in my ear, sermonises there with its husky sigh that to children all questions are toys, that to wisdom my birthright was best.

"Then let the old story go in its worthlessness.

What the daughter of a poor selector was to my father she is to me, or as much lower as I have bettered the name and fame of a squatter.

“At this end of the table lay the new purchase, at the other were displayed chased goblets, frames of filagree or carving, sword hilts, clasps, lamps, quaint spoons and candlesticks, the usual things one sees in silver-work, which I had purchased as a collector. I now wished to choose between the two branches, silver-work here, stringed instruments there, on their respective merits.

Look at this Cremona. Many eager buyers had offered its weight in gold merely to play on, to produce the self-same sounds that ordinary fiddles produce. Others had gone higher, to its weight in gold twice told, rich collectors these of grades only inferior to mine, or fiddling amateurs. I rescued it from them all, little thinking how soon the debt of gratitude would be returned with huge accrescence. Foregone conclusion accompanied the instrument home, else I should hardly have troubled to array all that silver against it; and as it happened, the very presence of the other side told in favour of my new friend. In the first place, silver tarnished; never had my former treasures looked so lack-lustre, so discredibly

dull. Then in the matter of interest: the holder of one recognised 'Strad,' of those specially favoured, specially christened few that can be reckoned on one hand (who would have the band more numerous? *I* would not), is catalogued throughout Europe for the fact. If he had gained a Raphael for his country, or a diamond fit for the thumb-ring of a giant, how could he have more honour? This I had done already. Glorious indeed to have branded my name beside the master's upon a work that cannot die!

"And with all this sterling value of interest there is nothing to tempt thieves. You cannot break it up or melt it down, no 'fence' would take it, but as you buy you must sell, credentials in hand; there is no avoiding publicity, for that is the value, the marks of individuality are sole arbitrators of price. Now silver may have its fortuitous value to the collector, but silver in itself excites cupidity.

"The proof. I turned like a flash, and like a flash it fell—*here*—sheathing itself in the wood, the work of an instant.

"I had been sitting intently poring over my treasures, catching the soft light of a silver lamp in the eyes of this varnish, and contrasting it with the dull metal over there at the other end of the

board. A feeling of oppression, always the effect of deep studying, made me look up with a gasp, and there stood my assailant near the doorway by which he had entered from the dining-room. He, too, had been taking stock of the silver, no doubt, for I caught the gleam of his eye as it met detection. Simultaneously he sprang at me with another gleam, not lighter, not more murderous, not quicker. I caught it—the gleam of steel, closed, twined my arms, and held like grim death. Long moments he spun about like a bull in the clutch of a lion. He was a heavier man than I, a man of vast frame, bearded and gaunt, but young—I should say a mere youth. And I was of a hardier age, and I had the lion's 'holt,' at his back.

"Over went the lamp *crash*, and *out*, but the firelight still played on the varnished wood still sheathing the long knife which had struck point downwards into the carpet.

"While all being seemed to be centred in my arms—less a man than a vice—my eyes fell on this spectacle in the firelight, and even then I think there must have been fresh vigour in the thought of its significance, its opportunity. Achilles' shield was not more illustrious, or fashioned by a supreamer hand than this; but the shield and the weapon!—what a

work of art! an immortal thrill, an embodied sensation!

"Round and round, butting walls, battering furniture, grinding silver in a headlong paroxysm of struggling, I held on. My trophy was now fortunately hidden by the displaced table, but the mind's eye saw it as a centre, a superb centre round which our storm of passion surged and heaved furiously. Calm in the glint of firelight it lay, not wood and steel, but immortality, a jewel in a tempest. While my arms held to their sockets I would preserve it.

"This way and that my resolve was jerked and swung, the great torso within my arms swelling and straining until it seemed the fetters must burst; still, still before me, calm in the firelight shone the object to which I clung; not to be gainsayed, determination melted in these arms.

"At last—to the clock perhaps a minute, to me an age—he stopped to breathe and curse. My feet dangling limp, breathless, conscious only of that iron grip about the arms, mine about his, and about mine the steel of immortal purpose, I felt his bull neck here beside my cheek—felt it, I could not see beyond that trophy, and turning, bit it.

“‘Quiet!’ hissed purpose, face to face with a desperate strait; ‘quiet! or I’ll kill you there.’

“The hurly-burly must have been frightful, though neither of us at the time had noticed a sound. One a wrench, the other a fetter, no more than that. Must not eternity be one act, since any act on which we are wholly concentrated feels like eternity?

“The wrench and the vice—one breathing stertorous curses involuntarily while mustering strength for a supreme effort, the other instinctively gasping out its best chance of self-defence. A wild shriek rang like a rifle shot across the position, and, as if struck by a bullet, he fell, prone, headlong, with the clang and the thunder of our double weight, upon the scattered silver in the shadow behind the table.

“Half stunned, but no longer in the monopoly of that gripping, I was conscious now of footsteps and of voices, of the tumult there had been, of a past and present. The people of the house came with lights and domestic weapons. I rose, he was gone; I looked, he had robbed me of the knife.

“The fall must have loosened its hold, as a fall had loosened mine, and snatching it as he

rose, the thief had leapt from the window by which he had entered.

"Perhaps, on second thoughts, it would have been rather theatrical. I try to think so, in gratitude for the fact that my grasp was not the sole one shaken off. Had the knife held when that villain snatched it, as a clue to his identity—horrible thought! My shield—as a shield, fashioned more divinely than ever Achilles' was thought to have been! its loss—poor indeed.

"Descending to details, I found that the violin's neck had been snapped off by the force of the blow. Had the injury proved irreparable I should not have cared much, since in future the violin was always to pose as a shield; but expert fingers easily rectified the mischief with a little glue. Next morning I formed my plans, and easily gave them publicity. Of them it is not necessary to speak. All the world knows that my fortune will accompany my preserver. It must be kept in state, or the money goes to charity. All the world thinks that gratitude first prompted me to collect so many instruments, and form them into so regal a setting for this, the 'Druish Strad.' If artifices were used, artifices were needful, and to mention them needless.

"Even now I ache to think of the struggle of that night, the satisfaction of my bruises, the exultation of—what did I call it?—ay! significance, opportunity.

"Significance. Oh, yes; that wound was very eloquent. A long, long while I leaned over it, listening to language summarised thus: 'I was great, I was famous, one of the sweetest singers ever fashioned by the hand of man to bring out the latest music of Nature's handiwork. The voice that thrilled all listeners has been given for your life; henceforward we are one, and must exalt each other in ways unknown before to-night.'

"There was the opportunity. Has it not been taken? Surely, surely. But old age finds illusion in all things visible. When have these dead lips seemed less eloquent than any living ones? Did *her's* ever speak of such promise? nay, rather of deprivation. Still, as then, my preserver's eloquence comes to a mind jaded with buffeting, with the echoes of turmoil and hubbub then, so now with the echoes of years, saying: 'Success, deprivation—what are they? which is which?'

"They are blending; they are running together as in dreams; the Cremona with her lips, she with the Cremona's.

“What a solvent is sleep! All things floating in one essence; the years, the struggle. Strange sounds. . . . Elsie—as she cried then . . .”

[“*Poor gentleman!*” says a foot-note supplied by the rich gentleman’s landlady. “He was found quite, quite insensible over his studies, which he did not ought to have dreamed of shut up alone so much after dinner; and though he rallied wonderful for his age, never after set pen to paper. Nor shall I ever see such another lodger.”]

II

THE "SONG BIRDS"

CONDITIONS favourable to rheumatism have also proved favourable to roses about Lockthorpe. The important event of the village calendar is quite aware of this fact: strawberries, early apples, raspberries, and rhubarb are mighty factors of the flower-show, no doubt, but the show is timed mainly with an eye to roses.

It is a great event. No sooner has one show passed than thoughts begin to revolve about the next one; and though time rolls on to a winter of preparations, a decided cooling off in most instances, all warm up again into interest when the buds bring another perigee in sight.

For one reason, it is not an agricultural neighbourhood. The village potentates are bagmen; the villagers work principally at old-fashioned looms, either straddling with the insolence of necessity across cottage floors, elbowing domestic effects into obscure corners, or in the ramshackle "shops" of their employers. As yet only one

modest factory has been planted at the end of Lockthorpe nearest the town, with steam, real steam, if you please, that finds employment for the "hands" of the foremost and most enterprising bagman.

Suppose you have come from the town by omnibus, carrier's cart, private conveyance, or the new line of rails (it's seven miles if you walk, and the roads, if not dusty, are heavy). From the factory as you go, there is a whish—clamp—whir-z-z all the way up the street, while women sit in the convexities of ancient doorsteps, plying their needles over the produce of the "frames." When work slackens, and the wives have disappeared to boil the kettle, before the street grows noisy with the rising generation trooping home from its pastime in fields and lanes about the schoolhouse, forth come the husbands from their school, also on thoughts of relaxation intent. Some gravitate to the inn, and some few find their account in leaning against posts, but the major part of them, or the better part, have gardens, and keep them with credit.

Preparations were always active for some time before a definite date could be allotted to the flower-show by its active and enterprising committee headed by the head-gardener of Safington, the manor-house. Lockthorpe had drifted away

from Safington in many respects, but among its gardens the manor-house still filled an important position. The head-gardener was always responsible for about half the exhibits, sent not for competition, merely to hold up a lofty ideal before the village and swell the array; while as for the lord of the manor, Lockthorpe never understood how his share of the programme played the part of one of those looms, domineering over fruit and flowers in the eyes of the numerous visitors.

One morning in August, the sun, rising over the park trees of Safington, looked down upon the scene of the flower-show. For many a morning past he had risen upon rising interest—the heart-burnings, hopes, and anxieties of eager competitors—devoting every moment's leisure, and something more, to destined prize-winners. He had been welcomed as an ally, and bitterly abused as a foe, according as he expanded some blossoms prematurely, in spite of shading, and forced others to be contemporary with the nick of time. He had watched the rapid rise of two stately marquees, and one of lowlier frame destined for refreshments, in a five-acre field, only separated from the great gates of Safington Park by the width of a dim-coloured dusty road. Beneath his beams the erection of swing-boats and round-

about for the delectation of village children had proved excessively diaphoretic. And finally, having housed all their more susceptible exhibits in the shade of the canvas, beneath his beams the exhibitors were congratulating themselves on the promise of a right-down fine day.

It was eight o'clock. Judging and private views were to commence at ten, and at twelve the show was to be formally opened by lord and lady promoters of red-letter days from the other side of the county. Four hours intervened, and judging from appearances, no vegetable in that exhibition had been forced half as rapidly as the order that was to ripen by twelve o'clock—thanks, chiefly, to the prevalence of children.

"Them blessed posy classes swamps the hull of us out," was an opinion often heard, and never controverted, in quarters inundated by overflowings of wild-flower competitors and their friends, struck into solid starings at classes remote from their own.

"Now, you boys!" "Them dratted posy classes!" "What's up wi' the man at the gate?" "A regimen' wouldn't stop 'em at those holes i' the hedge." "*Now*, you boys!"

So the work goes on amidst busy hands, tongues, feet; the very atmosphere seems busy with its load of sweet scents contending with

the sour smell of trodden grass. The far end of the central marquee, however, the place of honour, was filled in yesterday with a great glass-fronted case fitting to the curve of the canvas. Before it slopes a broad bed of exquisite foliage, rising at the sides into tall palms, while the top is draped with many-coloured bunting, a work of art in itself.

An exquisite frame, but where is the picture worthy such a place of honour? Ten o'clock comes; the last touches have been administered to exhibits, the last stragglers ejected, and the central marquee is given over to the judges. It is a mass of flowers and foliage; fruit and vegetables you will find in the other tent, if you care for such things as can be looked at only with an eye to consumption at the best of times. Grave men with fateful eyes carry a weight of responsibility from class to class, measuring, and comparing, and giving verdicts that are carefully registered by their attendants in looks of fate. Other grave men are no doubt similarly occupied in the utilitarian tent, but never mind them, for even these labours among the purely ornamental must soon be disturbed.

Midst murmurs of "Here they come!" the park gates open to admit a cart which, attended by five or six men, grinds across the road and on

to the turf, to the front of the central marquee. With a man at each end heavy trunks are lifted out, and carried staggeringly, to the detriment of judges, on to the place of honour, where they are left within a railing that guards the plants in front of the great glass-case. The glass-case is lined with white, studded with gilt hooks, and its centre displays a great star of ruby plush, twelve-pointed, gorgeous.

A young man who has ridden up on a pony presently comes forward, plants are displaced, a movable panel removed, then trunks are opened, and the new-comer hangs their contents on the hooks in rows upon rows of fiddles, each with its pendant of descriptive gilt-edged elegance. Commencing at one end, he works his way back to the star opposite the open panel, then similarly fills in the other side; at the bottom a row of 'cellos, then tenors, then violins, as high as he can reach, until all hooks are occupied but the centre one, the most honourable place in the whole place of honour. Two official-looking persons with sharp faces and tweed suits stand guarding a little box. One of them takes it up, and lays it respectfully within the glass case. The young man there opens it carefully, and suspends the final instrument above quite a scroll of description printed on vellum. Then



he steps out, the panel is readjusted, and the plants replaced, not quite so artistically as before; they are now of service in guarding those treasures to whose state the two men in tweed suits also minister by waiting like courtiers, never obtrusive, but never absent, all the day.

The very judges gather round, suspending their arduous duty to watch these final operations. Paul Druish, the young man who arranged the collection, receives their respectful congratulations with forced complacence, as if it dashed his spirits to be charged with artistic taste. He sighs as he turns away, leaving the loiterers, both strangers and dependants of his adopted father the lord of the manor, all paying their court to the song-birds.

And if even the judges are for a time lost in spectacular musical instruments, how should casual strangers notice the flowers? Flowers! flowers are for the villagers who have raised them, but adulation drawn from the four cardinal points hangs in a cloud all day about those regally caged song-birds, who stare mutely back, flaunting in their borrowed plumage of romance.

The lord of the manor is away, so many duties devolve upon his adopted son, Paul Druish. The day being a public holiday, a special train, with a special carriage laid on for the binous nobilities

who are to open the flower-show, brings quite a flock of strangers to the place. Other flocks come in carriages to grace the occasion with a preponderance of fine dresses; few present are at once poorly clad and unfamiliar with the local celebrity of the flowers or the fame of those mute violins.

A gaunt old man of vast frame, but rendered less conspicuous by garments a world too large even for him, entered the show-ground towards evening. How he came there it was hard to say, for the crowds were thinning. The prizes had been given for children's sports and for flowers, and fine-plumed visitors flown in the train of nobility. Few people were left lingering in the dusky marquees; only a far corner, where a sort of fair went on, still looked like a fair, with lights and noise and merriment. Horses were turning their fastest, boats swinging their highest, rifles snapping away in quite a fusillade against dull care, while Punch and other public characters did such a stroke of business that an itinerant fiddle and harp had sat them down to rest and take a snack in a dusty hedgerow. Talking of fiddles: Punch had made a great hit, figuratively, and several great hits, literally, by using a sixpenny one (that sounded, when he played it, uncommonly like pan-pipes) as a baton, and by weav-



ing into his comedy a travesty of the gorgeous romance flaunting within there on its ruby-plush star. When a battered murderer popped up hugging an oyster-knife, while the great comedian squealed out his love-sick serenade to the paraffin moonlight, it was a huge joke; but when after a smart bout the fiddle descended in a final bang on the murderer's skull, such a roar went up from the tickled crowd that the serenade had to wait, while pan-pipes went round with the hat before it could be resumed.

While all eyes about the gate were turned towards the distant sound of this merriment, the gaunt old stranger entered, unnoticing and unnoticed. Undeterred by the tide of vehicles and sightseers setting the other way, he came slowly in, with down-fixed eyes, and a step suggestive of gravitating rather than of voluntary movement. The flower-show proper closed at seven, and already the marquees were invaded by people attending to their plants, confusion being far worse in the floral department than in that of the fruit and vegetables.

Slowly, one might fancy unwillingly, the old man drew near to the scene of confusion. For an instant he paused at its entrance, and straightening his back, shot one swift glance over the assembled heads; then slouching for-

ward, again went gravitating on, with his shabby baggy coat and averted face—on with many a halt before temporary obstructions, like a man who wished to avoid notice rather than one incapable of forcing his way—on to the glimmering front of the lord of the manor's exhibit.

The violins were mere blots upon their white ground, and the ruby star had turned black with its precious occupant. Only one of the tweed-clad courtiers remained in attendance, the occasion for state having faded; the other had strolled out to refresh himself in the "booth," as local dialect termed the refreshment tent. His comrade, the younger of the two, was impatiently awaiting his return in order that he also might stroll out of the heavy, oppressive atmosphere for a like laudable purpose. Meanwhile his attention, straying in the dusk, turned instinctively to the shabbily-dressed old man—first with amusement, then curiosity, then professional hopefulness, that grew and grew to a most consuming interest. It was too dusky to see fine points of resemblance; and after straining his eyes in vain, the tweed-clad investigator settled down to wait patiently, with a new object in his more experienced comrade's return.

"I know I'm right though," he assured himself, standing in the shade where he could keep

the mysterious stranger well in sight without being seen. "That's the man who stabbed at old Druish in the affair Milbank was talking of as we came up in the train this morning. Lord! to think of me spotting him! Why, it's twenty years before I joined the force! what a slice of luck—one of the first jobs old Milbank was ever employed on, and still as fresh as paint in everybody's mouth, thanks to that fiddle! If only I could feel sure enough to rush him single-handed! Let's see now. Six foot five or more, and looks big-boned even for that; suspected of uttering more sours than any black sheep unshorn; suspected of complicity in that Yankee coining affair; supposed to be hiding in Russia; supposed to be hiding in Austria; supposed to be the identical person who stabbed at a gentleman as he was playing tunes in his sitting-room, or something, and stuck his knife into that fiddle instead. Ay! that's the cream of it—the most exciting notoriety of the lot—it would be the making of me." (Here the soliloquiser gave way to a paroxysm of internal fidgeting.) "If only I dared—if only I dared. *Is* it him, or only a notion put into my head by what old Milbank was yarning? Let's hark back over it. In the first place, he found that such a character had been noticed on the night of the attempt, hanging about the house,

by a family of trampers, or something. They spoke of him as big, shady, young and outlandish-looking. Didn't try him for a copper. In the next place, he found that the holes in the wood corresponded to a knife of foreign make: thick back, hollow ground, long pointed—say Spanish. A man to correspond had been lodging in a shady part of the town, and was traced to London. Passed by the name of Overhill. Had money. Got abroad. What brings him here to-night? That coat is a foreigner; I'll swear it's had fur on the cuffs. It's a baggy overcoat slipped on straight over the shirt, that's what it is. Then what brings him here to-night? Does he think to lay hands on that fiddle, as a clue at second-hand to his knife? After all these years—nonsense. We'd never convict him, but, Lord! what a puff it would be! Something must bring him, something we don't know of. He never touched the silver that lay at his hand—was that greenness, or murder? Lord, send Mr. Druish first, that I may tell him my suspicions before old Milbank gets the credit of them! Stare away, old 'un, stare away; plenty of time; I see it's the fiddle that draws you. Lord, to think of sixteen stone being drawn from goodness knows where by a bit of wood! That's the secret. It's the notoriety of that blessed instrument that keeps his first

attempt awake—fascinating—more than all he's done on the cross since then."

Paul Druish, the young man whose return the detective prayed for, had passed a busy day since hanging those instruments in their places in the morning. After receiving nobility in the hideously bedizened little station, all smoky iron, raw masonry, and bunting, among a crowd of people he did not know, who whispered personal remarks, and stared him out of countenance, he had escorted it to the show-ground, round the show, and listened with a vast show of exotic delight to its speechifying. The staring made him nervous, and the delight—pah! what stupid work it was pretending to see a whole gospel of profundity in the fact that gardening is salutary, pretending to be tickled to the heart's core over the noble speaker's first juvenile attempt to immortalise his name in round hand mustard and cress! He wanted to be away in the woods with his sketch-book, looking into the beauties he was almost afraid to seem to recognise in company. But in process of the duties with which adroit business on his adopted father's part had left him saddled, this want was replaced by another, and he wanted—oh! how he wanted to get away from that fiddle.

The Druish violin, the Druish violin: it was on everybody's lips at the flower-show; it got into

the noble opening speech, and a dozen times, at least, it had to be taken out and placed in noble hands, and shown and explained. Poor Paul! he was only twenty, and an artist born. The instrument might one day make him rich, by the channel of gratitude whose source was that wooden knife wound. He had looked at it innumerable times, yearning over the profession already borne down derelict on the tide of prospective opulence; now, on the show-ground, surrounded by five groups intent on a golden haze, the tide became more potent; his whole individuality seemed to be caught up and possessed by the history, the romance, the glamour of that superannuated instrument. The touch of its rigid lips fascinated his fingers, and left him wondering, behind a quick eye and a nervous laugh, whether the man whose preservation they recorded, the uncle long dead, never seen, knew what a fateful word he had placed in them once for all. Round the great luncheon-table at the Park this word was echoed, then back again on the show-ground at the prize-giving, then all the way to the station; outbidding the flowers, outbidding Nature herself—the last sound ever to be uttered by the Druish violin.

It was deep gloaming ere Paul could surrender himself to the removal of his arbitrary fate, the

black star looming among its blots of satellites on their white ground. His star, but not his only, for there, as a crowning monument of its power, stood the shabbily-dressed old man, still entranced—the very man whose murderous hand lay at the root of all—helpless as a prisoner before his handiwork.

"Are you in charge of that instrument, sir?"

Paul Druish was beginning to make his way to the benighted instrument case by removing a segment of the pot-plants by which it was surrounded. He looked up testily, for, having flattered himself that the external tyranny of "that instrument" was over for the day, the question fell like a last straw upon his patience.

"Which instrument?" he replied. "Here are several dozen, I think." Then he took up another plant.

"Nay, sir, I meant no offence; the centre one."

Paul looked up again at the dusky figure beside him. It felt painfully ironical just then to be asked whether he was in charge of an instrument into whose dead past all his future had been thrown as into a dungeon; but the speaker, though he loomed vast, was evidently an old man, and moreover spoke with such studious deference that irony vented itself in a laugh.

At the sound, half-a-dozen men who had been

loitering outside entered the marquee, bearing lanterns. Paul watched the yellow lights flooding their way by stately foliage and sleeping blossoms along the show benches; his companion watched them too, and seemed to shrink back, but presently satisfying himself that the newcomers were merely servants from the Park carrying cumbersome boxes on their shoulders, he recovered his equanimity, and calmly turned to utilise the light in surveying the incomparable collection of stringed instruments for whose reception the boxes were obviously intended. Taking up one of the lanterns while the men were apologising to Paul for their delay, he waved it as if surveying the glass-case from end to end, striking strange gleams out of the glossy palm leaves ranged on either side. His own eyes were hidden beneath shaggy brows, or their strange gleam would have been seen burning—burning straight at the heart of the collection, the historical instrument about which he had questioned Paul when no other listeners were present.

“The Druish violin!” he muttered. Then correctively, “The Druish violins!” in a tone of over-acted admiration.

It was almost impossible that he could read descriptive labels by that light, but ejaculatingly

he uttered the names of famous makers—Maginni, the Amati, Klotz, Steiner, Stradivarius—like a man familiar with the magicians who conjured music out of forest trees that must have served as academies for forest song. By degrees, however, his wandering tongue drew in the same direction as his eyes, to the central instrument throned on its ruby star, the focus of all the splendour of its surroundings, marked, just above the sound F sharp, by a diagonal stab, the focus of its own world-famous history.

Paul Druish stood patiently by answering questions, while his men, or rather the men of his adopted father, the lord of the manor, took down the less important instruments, and packed them carefully in their respective cases ready for removal to Safington Park for the night. The Lockthorpe flower-show always ran a second day, on a slightly reduced footing. On the morrow the poor flowers would be merely adjuncts of a fair; on this first day they had seemed, so far as Paul was concerned, merely adjuncts of his uncle's spectacular instruments. The Druish Collection, and especially the Druish violin, had been dunned in his ears all day; the certainty of a repetition on the morrow made him feel all the sicker of the subject.

Upon a sour basis of trodden grass, the heavily

enclosed atmosphere, slumberous and heavy with the breath of lilies and roses sleeping in the vault of the marquee, proved a faithful copy of the moral atmosphere, as Paul endeavoured to cloy the appetite of this final bore with the melligenous details in which his own life was to be embedded. The old man's eager curiosity crept out more and more as he questioned, in a rising scale.

And so that was the Druish violin—really? Its fame had spread far; he had heard wafts of it in foreign lands—oh! far, very far. And was all the history true?

"That depends," replied Paul, with a laugh. He had the quick laugh and nervous manner of one who often does violence to his own feelings. As the old man turned to him inquiringly, he glanced with artistic appreciation at a most powerful craggy countenance, disclosed by the glimmer of lantern light upon its prominences. "Shylock," thought Paul involuntarily. Then as an after-thought, "in a sixth act of the play." He laughed again, and pointed to a scroll in the half-dismantled glass-case.

"I mean," he explained, "it depends whether you were able to see that document when you first came in. It contains the history that re-christened our violin, and has kept it otherwise mute these forty years or more."

The old man's gaze had been again drawn to its loadstone—the instrument, not the scroll. With the main incidents there emblazoned he was evidently well versed, and might easily be so, although a dweller in the uttermost parts of the earth, for, wherever conversation turned upon violins, this one was sure to crop up by right of its innate worth and romantic history.

So this was the Druish violin; perhaps the most famous instrument on earth. Ah! fatal stab that, instead of killing, made the fortune of a rich man thirsting for notoriety; that enabled him to attach great names—so it was said—a fine family, great wealth, and all these otherwise idle instruments as a mere setting to that one, making them more famous as its dependants, and it most famous as their lord.

The old man paused, and clenched his hands—like Shylock.

Mr. Druish had been dead several years, eight or nine? He died in great pain—no? He would have done, though, but for *that*. Ah! he was a strong man, a very strong man for his weight, and wore out gradually, like going to sleep. He had recently bought that instrument when it interposed between him and what would otherwise have been his fate? On that very day? Just God! to think of that!—on that

very day! and they talk of providence! He had bought it for hundreds of pounds, to lock up as a mere curio, like a Hindoo idol, or a bit of curious silver-work; he carried it home, and sat him down to wonder, maybe, where the money's worth came in. And then it turned to come between him and vengeance.

Bereft of ducats, daughter, and all other treasures, the old man stood. Beneath the masks of dim light and strong restraint fury seemed to be working. There was no apparent reason for its presence, but it added to the attractiveness of a problem. What was this stooping, shabbily-dressed stranger, whose ostensible age and ostensible idle curiosity sometimes merged in a full tone and movement vigorously purposeful? The bore had vanished in an ideal Shylock; now Shylock vanished in a moral conundrum.

"Pardon me," said Paul quickly, as a possible solution occurred to him, "there was no question of vengeance; only of a burglar taking bloodshed *en route* for the spoons." He laughed. "Had there been any possible thread of dark mystery it would be woven in there, you may be very sure. An immense acquisition."

The old man started, and recovered himself, stooping voice and figure to his former attitude

of soft, deferential unobtrusiveness. Doubtless, doubtless. He had not read the document. He only went by hearsay.

"And yet—doubtless I should have read there that the great man, Druish, looked upon that instrument as his preserver and best friend. That he spent his money buying other instruments into slavery to do it honour. That he spent his money buying a fine family into slavery for the same purpose, that his name might shine there so nobly, set in fine riches, fine instruments, fine names, fine romance, not living as free children and great deeds—children that might have cursed him for his deeds—but as slaves under lock and key. Even so, it was not the instrument that befriended him, ah! no—just God! the hand that made that stab."

Very wonderingly Paul explained the conditions under which the Druish violin had been bequeathed to his adopted father, the lord of the manor. Should it be lost or destroyed, all the money must be forfeited to charity.

"Charity, charity!" echoed the old man. "Just God! *his* charity! Is it there, padlocked like those instruments in their cases, to keep pride from falling? It was a dark night, black frost on the snow as keen as a knife *then*——"

The indiscreet simile was hastily nipped, and

the speaker resumed with a decidedly foreign accent, forgotten in his moments of emotion—

“Ah, sare! If I might be permitted but to touch! If my hands might have for one moment the felicity of that glorious relic. They are used, they are habituated; many instruments have been entrusted to them for repairs. None such as this, but many of less calibre.”

Paul had taken the Druish violin from the servant who was about to stow it away, and stood holding it to the light, in the hope that it might divert the bitter current of this enigmatical old stranger's thoughts. He hesitated—not that there could be any real risk with so many attendants about, but still he hesitated; the extraordinary parade of precautions which always surrounded the ruling planet of Safington Park made him hesitate, and then for the first time he noticed that the two tweed-clad officials engaged to guard it at the flower-show were not in attendance.

“Where are the detectives?” he demanded hastily.

It was like a preconcerted scene. As if in answer to a direct question, a light flashed suddenly full in the stranger's face, showing it wild and troubled. There was a swift rush from opposite sides, a crashing of plants, a rending

of canvas; and leaving his puckered slop coat in the hands of his assailants, as a butterfly bursts into winged life through its chrysalis case, the old man broke out and flew.

Paul was the first to regain his feet among the equilibriums that had been taken unawares. He dropped the violin into its case, and headed a rush of his men for the door, almost falling in his hurry over a harp that stood near the doorway; and so into the open. A few stragglers from the flare-lighted space at the end of the green, where the village was still at high jinks, were staring one way to a moonlit gap in the hedge. Without pausing an instant Paul darted for it, his men at his heels, with stragglers drawn along, converging, by the momentum of that little body of excitement, like the tail of a comet. Some one shouted *thieves*, and then with a rising buzz and a thickening crowd the villagers came streaming after.

In open fields beyond, the black forms of the detectives could be seen running their hardest. Being very fleet of foot, young, ardent, and in excellent training, Paul easily distanced his companions, and came to the front. He did not try to leave the detectives behind; apart from the surprising vigour shown by the fugitive, he had no idea of taking the initiative against

an unknown offender. So he restrained his strides, running easily along between the minions of the law, as much at home as if he had been in a drawing-room, but brimming over with excitement, and listening with artless wonder to the laboured demonstration upon either hand that what was such very easy work to him tried others dreadfully.

To the question, Where is he? the puffing officers indicated a white-shirted figure showing ghostly against white meadows to the right, and heading straight for a broad inky bank of park trees with a fleetness wholly incompatible with the former assumption of age.

The old man had gained a considerable start by doubling along a pitch-black hedgerow; but, forced into the open by the significance of that swelling murmur from the show-ground, pursuit was gaining at every stride. He ran well, formidably; those behind him saw little to remind them of an old man, except in the bare bald head fringed with rough crisp locks of grey. He ran hard, not hoping to escape by swiftness, but to distance that crowd in the rear, which moved by diversion, not by duty, would move neither far nor fast, to lose its breath, of which commodity frame-work knitters and the like had little enough to spare. The real pursuers,

he knew, would be two in number—the legal sleuth-hounds—an old dog and a young one; once safe from other foes he would face round, hold out his empty hands to lure them on, and then—they would see!

Over the crest of a last hill the old man struggled, running desperately; and then down, down with huge strides, brushing the hoary dew of a long slope that led to a white streak of dusty highway, and black pollards laced with silver upon river banks. Nearly opposite, the road forked out white into the shadows, across a bridge; but the covert of park trees rose higher and higher above descending footsteps, crossing a steep ascent, inaccessible.

The bridge! On to that coign of vantage sped the fugitive, crashed out through a hedge into the highroad, crunching pebbles at its edges, crossed, turned, and stood half-way between the parapets. As his feet ceased those of the two pursuers became audible simultaneously upon the road-metal. And there they stood, one leaning against a corner of masonry, one in the open moonlight in the centre of the road.

The old man started, for *this* was not a detective. A hoarse voice shouted "Come on!" and then, to his inexpressible chagrin, a third

pursuer appeared, the elder sleuth-hound, who had fallen back, content to keep the younger one in sight, as he kept the quarry.

The old man hesitated as the trio approached, with Paul in the centre, hearts thumping and breaths coming thick. Then with a wild cry he sprang on to the parapet, and beneath the frantic clutches of baffled hands plunged into the well of night that yawned at his feet.

The grey-haired detective ran to the other side, the two younger men leaned over the spot from which the leap had been taken, straining their eyes down stream as he strained his more experienced ones *up*—all three breathlessly listening. The river murmured on its way towards Lockthorpe, and a thin form of water music, tinkling over pebbles far away, danced fairy-like upon the unbroken silence.

They were right though, the younger men. A sudden splashing and a stifled cry down stream filled them with horror. They ran, shouted, listened; heard a second, fainter cry, then silence expanding once more unbrokenly beneath the hideous mockery of water babbling peace.

After a long vain hour's search in black-edged water and black-patched banks, next morning

the two detectives fetched men and had the river dragged. *No one looked on.* All Lockthorpe was then gripped in the throes of a ferment. In an agony of cross currents the day went swinking along, yawing, slewing, and veering this way and that, hardly making a show at all of laying its course. Reports from the cardinal points made the village their vortex: what the drags found in the river, what they sought, what had happened, how it happened, all were forces that clashed to distraction that morning in Lockthorpe. An incredible whisper stirred, and crept into circulation. A credible whisper grew till it silenced all tumults, setting them spinning in awful glassiness round one centre—the Druish violin. What then though a man had been drowned; what then though iron fingers were groping in blind mud for the very hand that had stabbed out that great instrument's history long ago? The Druish violin was lost. True to its dilated character, even now the inert engrosser of all importance: all had turned on the fame and fortune that it brought; all now turned on the fame and fortune it swept away.

Young Mr. Druish (now "poor young fellow!"), returning to the flower-show on the preceding

night, found that his *posse* had already taken home the cases containing the lord of the manor's exhibit, including the Druish violin, to Safington. There in blissful darkness all remained, or thought they did, both mainspring and dependants, until morning found the mainspring case unlocked and empty, having been opened whilst unguarded, and the mainspring flown.

Whither? Idle question—it was gone. That sufficed—it was gone; and fabulous rewards and efforts kept the loss intensely vivid.

Even the detectives only thought of the man they had pursued as a possible thief, or at least implicated in the theft of the mainspring. One of them, using the village Dog and Gun for sporting purposes, found there—a clue? well, something that diverted attention from the river, at any rate. Mind you, both river and the man supposed to be drowned there lived to interest only by association with the violin. But thus ran the wind-up of that seemingly tragical moonlight chase.

A crusty, rusty old cobbler who diverted his tough vocation with angling, whilst winding up the week with a pint at the Dog and Gun, was moved thereby to inexplicable chucklings. Artfully plied with beer and questions by the scouting official, with many guffaws he declared that “If

yon customer on—he ! he ! night o' th' flower-show,
when he was trying t'ode hole *above* the bridge,
had swallowed his bait and—he ! he !—tackle held,
he ! he !—he'd have been about the wettest fish as
ever was landed."

III

SUBURBAN ANTIPODES

RAY STEPNEY—he preferred Ray to the fuller Raymond—more euphonious; brighter, he said: “If a man may drop a whole name laid on only for show, why not half one? ’Mond is not all the world, then cut it short, in the name of common-sense, do. A counting-house is bad enough, and a colonial counting-house at that, without anachronising a tilt-yard into it with Raymond. Ray much better, an admirable counting-house name.”

A pang of regret was intoned in that reference to a tilt-yard. Nothing could have better suited the young man than to pose legitimately as Raymond in a world of chivalry and romance. From his mother he inherited this glow; from his father—Stepney, a name of wholesale import in pickles and jams. Stepney meant commerce. The son and heir of a commercial magnate must be applied to wearing his father’s shoes in the world’s market-place. The career was a matter

of course : first commercial schooling, then college for three years, then a year in London where the great headquarters stood, a block in itself, redounding sweets and sours upon other blocks, then full-fledged through a succession of humbler branches remote, where he lit like a bird working his homeward round back to London again, to build and roost for the season in the top of his native roof-tree. To these clear lines he came with an artistic temperament forced to find its scope in places that would have been unnoticeable to characters sailing by the stars and not by a chart. He was not a reading man, and his position was a humble one, thanks to the hopeless conservatism of his father, who felt bound to inflict upon others what had been inflicted upon himself.

"You are only a sucking diamond yet, my boy," said the old man ruthlessly. "Twice the number of carats, squares and cubes the value; but till then, what I had from my father in Scotland you shall have from me in Australia, and let me tell you I should have felt on velvet if butcher's meat could be bought for twopence a pound."

Such velvet assuredly would not cover any expensive forms of excitement; but still, by dint of a little simple contriving, Ray managed to fit

out his own life pretty much in its own fashion. For one thing, he never sought the embellishment of *bars*; and for another, he was content with humble lodgings.

Pickles and jams reigned supreme from nine till four; after office hours he treddled himself away to a remote suburb shouldering primeval gum trees, and boring their ranks with a long road that was to have gone somewhere on business, but stopped half-way, perhaps before a broken bridge, perhaps listening to the parrots. At any rate, there hung the gracious promises of traffic, and upon the fictitious strength of them, among the little suburban picketings of civilisation, there sprawled a big, new, plastery hotel, as bare inside as out, like a fresh cut of raw material, and as much too big for its surroundings as some great, silly, overgrown hobbledehoy belated in a preparatory school.

Of this hotel Ray was the unprecedented boarder, so far as sleeping and two meals a day could make him. He seldom spent his evenings there, but after tea went spinning back to town, where he had a few congenial friends. Broadly speaking, their amusements were not divorced from intelligence; none of them shone as a bar-polisher, and all possessed romantic histories, or what could be made to pose as such. One in

particular had proved a very godsend, supplying Ray with far more food for leisure than it gave the owner himself. No end of bright theories were indebted to this history for their birth; no end of adventures could be sought and anticipated by its means.

The sensation was new, of course. Six months had passed from the year apportioned to young Stepney's study of edible luxuries in that colony before fate purveyed to his leisure this luxury of employment, and still five months remained when he looked at his watch—five months, and the gulf of an hour between him and tea-time. This was the dreariest hour of the twenty-four, it always was; no time to "do anything," for with Ray that process always entailed exploration. He would have made an admirable explorer, and might have written an admirable account of indomitable wanderings—in hieroglyphics. Words, words—no, he never could have invented language.

He yawned as he stood with a newspaper behind his back on the front doorstep, confronted by half-grown trees, old split palings, and a uniformity of iron roofs. The weather-stained chamfer-boards of cottage sides stood out in the afternoon sunshine like account-book leaves ruled for the usual entries: "By so many cases

pickles, jams assorted, bloater paste, cocoa;" and behind them dreary gums rose in a suitable background.

He thought of his brilliant theories manufactured in the service of a friend who no longer thought of serving himself in that way, and of what he would say to the friend when he saw him that night; how he would rekindle interest merged all day in art studies and Italian warehousing, how-*ow*!—how he wished that tea-bell would ring!

Three dogs with convocated noses sat gravely in the middle of the road; several shrill-voiced boys were playing cricket on unfenced allotments opposite, with rusty tins for wickets, rag ball, and rough-hewn bats. In mournful perspective straggled a string of cows gravitating on towards the unfinished end of the road, the fraudulent road on which the deluded hotel sighed reproachfully its inflated emptiness, plaster, and stale beer; while, on the other hand, an omnibus was toiling slowly uphill, with its load of two or three passengers, towards town.

Uphill, uphill—and in the bar behind, a drunken man was singing a song with a great deal of one note in it. Ray listened as he watched, and even in this vile repetition, vibrating to him from bare walls and the thin-show of

bottles paraded along the edges of their shelves, he found food for reflection. It followed the direction of his thoughts, and seemed to lead them on. The omnibus dipped downhill at a jog-trot, and in its place rose two little figures, one shaped like a triangle.

What have we here? An itinerant fiddle and harp came tramping along, pitched at the corner of the kerb before the bar door, tuned up, and commenced to play.

Theories brightened up wonderfully at the sound, for the listener, you must understand, had nothing else whatever to occupy his attention. His imagination had been caught by a romantic story, and played about it in an energetic sort of make-believe, as a hobby, utilising the most fanciful footholds of active co-operation.

The harper leaned wearily upon his incubus, and vamped with no more emotion than a barrel-organ; but the fiddler stood bolt upright, expansively, and scraped his strident strings with far more energy than skill; yet he played well—very well for a street musician, though his abounding zest and satisfaction could never be fully imparted to any audience. The tipsy bar applauded his vigour uproariously, and when, after a still more sky-rocketty second piece, he entered with his hat, some one even offered him a drink,

and to all the inmates—half-a-dozen workmen stayed on their homeward way by the marvellous fecundity of glasses when they congregate—he was an object of marked interest. Seeing this, the oracular landlord leaned affably upon the counter, and drew him into conversation. A man of great weight was the landlord; his fifteen stone was as nothing to his moral corpulence, in that neighbourhood. He deliberately took stock of the fiddler, who stood sipping his charitable beer, with all the coppers in his pocket—of his dusty clothes, his alert wiry figure that looked as tense as the strings beneath his arm, his high-dried German face, frouzy grey beard, and eyes that twinkled energy in cunning corners.

“Come far?” said the oracular landlord, with tardy recognition of claims to consideration as a man and a brother.

The fiddler, it seemed, had come from town, and finding that hotel to be the last spark of life on that delusive road, he presently meant returning. He had done pretty well in the town, and by the time he had transferred all available surburban coppers to his pocket his son’s fiddle would be mended, and then he could go away.

“You play well,” said the landlord. A growl of concurrence passed round the idly interested

bystanders, in compliment to which the little fiddler took his instrument and twanged it guitar-fashion. Every one knew the tune in a moment. A noteworthy person this. Sundry pairs of stumbling feet began to shuffle; then some one shouted, "What's your name?" The mouthpiece of public opinion behind the bar at once annexed the idea.

"You play well," he repeated firmly. "What's your name?"

"My name?" The little fiddler showed his teeth, and thrummed out the tune in an undertone. "Wilhelm—what you call Willeyam Taske. You think that I play well? Ah! you should hear my son. My skill is that of a six-year one to him!" The strings twanged out again, emphasizing exultation to snapping point.

But the landlord was not to be moved by any strings, ropes would not have drawn him from his expository station of organ and agent-in-chief of public opinion.

"You play well," he persisted dogmatically. "If I could do so I'd get myself into a band, and not go tramping."

"Ay, ay!" growled the chorus of approbation.

"There's worse players than you at the theatre," said the landlord, bringing it to a head.

What-you-call-William Thacker drive out all over him excited self-defence, using his limited English with the eloquent little-speak.

They did not see, they did not comprehend: he was not a trained musician. They set him up a complicated score—he must spell him out: he was not a fluent reader of notes. Besides, he made more money in the street than in an orchestra; he could command, and he did all for his son, to keep him in the Academy—a wonderful boy—in the phenomenon—the basis of his professors—to draw the son from studying—who presently would be through his course. And then—"I sit in the back, or perhaps take his money in the doors and hear the people praise, and see them moved, stand up, shout, throw wreaths, say 'Another Victory!' To know he owes his success first to me, to know that his wonderful inspiration was from my hands—gentlemen," said the little father, with a sudden check of solemnity. "I live for the pride of that moment."

Every word had been audible in the front doorway, of that empty room of a house: but the speaker in his ignorance had not heard cautious footsteps in the bar-parlour behind, which communicated with the bar by means of a sliding shutter. The party behind was now seen to

thrust his head into the opening, receive a long-whispered order from an invisible customer, serve him with a drink, and then set a foaming tankard in front of Taske. Alas! it was accepted with many thanks.

The tumbler of wine in the little opening was lifted, sipped, and rapped impatiently against the wood.

"Yes, yes," said the landlord, turning away from another conference with the invisible customer, "I see." But still he rubbed his bare elbows, and stared blankly as if trying to evolve an oracular dome of St. Paul's from ambient fog. Again admonished by the glass, he goaded himself forward, planted the elbows on the counter in front of the foaming tankard, and oracularly groped.

"I suppose," he began, "as your son, being a phenomena, has got to have a very expensive fiddle?"

Taske was artfully thrumming a jig, with a sly cat-like glance at the wilder spirits present, who were proposing to take the floor for just one kick up, against the advice of their elders. At the mention of his son, however, the little man flashed round that way into interest again.

Ah, yes! ah, yes! the instrument should be well worthy of such a wonderful boy.

"Must have lost a lot of money," said the landlady.

No: the instrument was slightly damaged, and I was not jumping in there.

"In England?"

The little man turned his face in his handkerchief for a long pull: then wiping his lips he laughed, and nodded slightly.

"I've got a little here with a hole in it," said the landlady, jerking his shoulder: "but they tell me the school's all wrong. Has no interest beside."

"Why keep it at all if it is worth nothing?" demanded Frank suddenly. "There is a very small man in those parts who has my son's—he can mend anything. I keep it at home only because he's good for me at just all: but now within a year of my son's long absence—ah! I cannot be present if his position is assured." The moment's reflection turned the matter of conscience. "But our cases may be different," admitted the little fellow more soberly. "Mine has got a slight hole, easy to say if the instrument was not so particular. But this is a hole clean out—the hole." He laughed with his black mouth and eyes in widened holes.

"The British School," exclaimed an exclamation voice: and there stood Ray Street in a white

heat of excitement beside the bewildered landlord. "Cheap!" echoed Ray deliriously. "How about Lockthorpe? Did you ever see so cheap a place in your life?—too cheap for buying; why not say you *brought* it, perhaps the most famous, certainly the most important instrument extant, from an open case on the Lockthorpe show-ground one night three years ago? You hear what he said, all of you? Keep your eye on that man. Mr. Boniface, don't let him out of sight for a single instant. And you, Taske, don't think of escape, for I should find you again. I would run you to earth, any earth, indeed I would. Here!" (throwing down a sovereign), "drink, dance, play, anything you like, but don't put yourself to the trouble of being hunted. I go to fetch a friend, one that dotes on music, and never on earth was music heard before sweeter than your confession will sound in his ears."

Before the expressive tableau in that bar had thawed into life again, a bicycle swept past, and went tearing up the hill towards town at racing speed.

Outside on the kerbstone sat the somnolent harpist thoroughly roused by the scent of danger. He feigned to doze, and when inquisitive sticks and fingers became emboldened to touch the harp-

strings, he covered them up with their battered oilskin case, and dozed again until the audience of half-a-dozen mites or so had dispersed. Then he arose, slunk round the corner, and stood listening to the rising jangle of the bar in unspeakable perturbation.

Twenty minutes—forty minutes passed before his comrade's white face came peeping round in eager search of him.

"Up," whispered Taske in his native tongue. "We must fetch that fiddle away at once—to-night—and warn Underhill to put another in its place marked in the same way, then make ourselves scarce. Which way does it lie from here? in what direction?"

The gesticulating camp-stool and fiddle-bow eagerly debated the question for a moment, then off the two men started, pegging away at their best pace towards oblivion, down the road that led to nowhere.

Cows strayed lowing home to their respective gates, the cricketers dispersed, the tea-bell sounded, announcing the time that drew all loiterers to table, though none attended its summons within the hotel. The very dogs smelt bones, and followed their noses. Gray's "Elegy" had nothing quieter than that road when next a customer turned in under the bar lamp.

"Heyday! Been having a field-day, missis," he exclaimed.

Half-a-dozen men were lying like logs on benches round the walls or on the floor, and behind the counter stood a bridling little woman casting glances worthy of total abstinence towards the bar-parlour, where some one was most oracularly snoring.

IV

COMPENSATION

PAUL DRUISH and his friend were walking to and fro in front of the General Post Office. It was pretty late at night. The rumble of wheels and shuffle of feet had ceased; by contrast with its familiar aspect the heart of that iron-capped metropolis lay more silent than any moonlit clearing beyond the suburbs. So uniform was still-life on either hand, that Paul was able to people it undisturbed with the incidents of another moonlight night three years ago—three years that he had passed in a glorious struggle. He saw himself as he was then, in England, the width of the world away, and impoverished by the dictates of a most resplendent fortune. Now he could earn his living as a draughtsman; he could illustrate books; and if not mistaken in thinking there was an opening for one more artist in Australia, he might do very well in his own line. So he saw pictures as he listened to Ray Stepney. When Ray

had flown to him, some hours ago, breathless with excitement, and had told him he might go straight back to Safington Park, that the one key to his position there was as good as found, of course he had caught fire at the tale. But when the person who wrongfully held the key was found to have mysteriously vanished, he fell back again to his first love, Art, shutting out the inert splendours of Safington with the idea of active usefulness.

"I cannot interrupt my work with more wild-goose chases," he said decisively. "You may be right in urging that we now have clues never dreamt of before; but I know the stuff that wild-goose quills are made of, and my time is not my own now."

"Bloated aristocrat," laughed the other. "You disclaim the assistance of Stepney's jams and pickles; but to-morrow morning I shall borrow money and leave of absence from my paternal house's agent here, and devote them to the service of your poor dear uncle, Sir Peter Parkley."

"My poor dear maternal uncle, and adopted father that was, before he turned me out, thanks you from me. Strange!" mused Paul, dropping irony for retrospection—"strange how that fiddler fellow Taske has got into my dreams! I seemed

to see such a character on the Lockthorpe show-ground when we lost our talisman—or a harpist. Yes, I can see a harp mixed up with that night. But then, you know, we always connected the theft with another man, a far more prominent figure—picturesque, gigantic, a variety of supposed criminals rolled into one six-foot-five.”

“I know,” interrupted Ray; “perhaps they worked in collusion.”

Paul stopped short, and looked from far away to his friend.

“Do you know,” he said, “I seem to have seen such a figure one day in this street. I was walking with one of our Specials, just as we are doing now, discussing a cartoon, and suddenly found myself staring at a comer, with an impression of Saul’s head and shoulders on my retina. I ran, but they had turned off, out of sight, and, thanks to the cartoon, out of mind as well; till now, with the substitution of moonshine for daylight, your strange discovery has revived them. The shadows fall much in the same direction, too,” concluded the speaker, surveying one of the opposite comers critically.

“I have it!” exclaimed his friend ecstatically. “Did you not tell me that the supposed thief was an instrument-maker?”

“So he told me.”

"And the real thief, this idiotic fiddler, who thinks of giving *me* the slip, as good as confessed that he had left his nefarious instrument with a very clever person in these parts for repairs. Why, the thing chimes in every note with the tall man you thought you saw round the corner there. And you stand here prating of pictures in the face of such a magnificent piece of reality! Druish, I am ashamed of you."

Druish laughed.

"Wait till your enthusiasm has stood for a year under a waterfall of hopes deferred," he rejoined grimly; "that will wash all its colours into the rainbow. Seriously, I used to flatter myself that the family romance had wound up most becomingly, but, upon my word, here is nothing but a vulgar burglary. Examine dispassionately, and what do you find? Of a thousand cranky will cases, one created by the rich man of the family, whose natural heir, as you pointed out, I am, makes his fortune depend on the possession of a violin. When we see a savage make a fetish of a bit of glass bottle, we may look at home and find parallel instances. This violin, damaged—for all I know, spoilt—for fiddling purposes, in preserving its owner's life, by this fluke becomes a fetish, and is handed over, with all the benefits accruing, to my maternal uncle.

In effect he belongs to the fetish, and thereupon says to me, 'You shall come and belong to the fetish when I am dead.' Observe," added Paul, in an altered tone, "the fiddle is really the heir of both these men whose natural heir I am. They have no other relatives. Perhaps I ought to have contested the fetish-maker's will. However, if Fate did not give me the money, it made me lose it. Some thief, tempted by, perhaps, one per cent. of what the thing represented to us, carried it off—whether a gigantic and picturesque criminal, for some unknown end, or a commonplace little strolling fiddler with a gifted son in want of a cheap Cremona—where's the romance? Of course I left home with a burning desire to undo the result of my carelessness. There's my poor uncle, my poor dear adopted father whom I ought to have adopted, saddled with a large estate and next to nothing to keep it on—a case of real distress," laughed Paul unfeelingly. "But in course of time I had to work for my living, harness an elegant pastime to the baker's cart; and as custom increased, the wheels had to be kept going."

"You have altered your opinion, then," began Ray, when his friend laid a hand on his arm and made him stop.

"My dear fellow," he said earnestly, "you have set me thinking, and I must sleep upon

the thoughts before they can draw up at a conclusion. I will not deny that the wheels are music to me ; they also suggest the rotatory survey of those who would find the best, truest aspect of things. I see, just as you do, the hard lines in which my carelessness has involved Sir Peter Parkley ; but let us beware of false sentiment. The money was a trust, morally as well as legally a trust, and the trust is now vested in the rescue of fellow-creatures from misery. The Druish Orphanage does not shine like the Druish Strad ; we cannot by any effort make the orphans romantic ; we walk in a narrowed light, true ; we could not have walked here at all in the blazing middle of the day. Thus an idea of compensation seems to hover round us. It may be there, just as scores of violins in the world may be marked in the same manner as the one you heard described this afternoon. You are a good fellow, Ray. Amuse yourself as you please on behalf of Sir Peter, but leave me out of your thoughts till to-morrow morning. Just at present I am inclined to admire this compensative moon-shine."

Ray Stepney's ardour was not to be extinguished by any abstract sprinklings. His magnificent piece of reality absorbed him wholly, and as for points of sight and rotatory surveys and

all those mental deterrents, why, they had no more weight with him than the stimulus of reward. No; the adventure was its own reward in his eyes, and all that did not breathe an adventurous spirit the eyes left severely alone. When a mill-dam bursts, however, all things generally do trend in the direction of the race. A strolling fiddler accused of having stolen a violin had thought to give Stepney the slip by running away; this was the main cause that had let loose all the forces stored for working the mill. Why did the man run away if he was not guilty? why had the fiddle not been heard of if stolen for the sake of a reward? these questions merely acted as a gradient down which determination rushed in a neck-or-nothing resolve of "getting to the bottom of it." Ray felt that he had been challenged by this strolling fiddler, whose character fitted the theft to a nicety—an ignorant old fellow, probably unable to read English, or to know the full significance of what he had stolen. He had ruined the owner of Safington, but he saw a mere Cremona, and his enthusiasm for the real or fancied gifts of his son condoned the offence. Ray remembered the enthusiasm, and for its sake, if the old man had acted reasonably, he would have endeavoured to let him off lightly, or to have secured him, from



the reward, a sufficient sum to buy another Cremona for the boy. But instead of submission, instead of restitution, the old man had gone off in open defiance of orders, and Ray picked up the gage and felt like fighting. Satisfied with the *carte-blanche* he had received, he went his way, leaving Paul Druish to decide on the merits of restitution framed in moonshine.

Now Paul was painting a picture. He was on the staff of an illustrated paper, that kept him pretty busy running about. Between whiles he worked in oils, sometimes at portraits, sometimes at fancies. Just now he was wrestling hard with an ambitious subject, one that he hoped might make the fancies of more value when it had been exhibited in Melbourne.

At eight o'clock he entered his studio. Paul lived in a wooden cottage on a hill, in a quiet part of the town, with a housekeeper who grumbled at his "hours," and two or three small dogs who rather liked them. Mechanically he prepared for resuming work, swept and dusted the room with his own hands, then strolled out on to the veranda, lit a pipe, caressed his dogs, and looked round upon the prospect. All these customary actions were mechanically performed; they suggested nothing while they were running their course, but then——

It was not a squalid neighbourhood—rough back spaces, neither yard nor garden, with clothes-lines and odd trees, sheds with rubbish-laden roofs, and band-boxy houses all tilted up on stumps against a broad hillside that merged in steppes of corrugated iron round the Post Office tower. Formerly its suggestion had sent Paul to his easel resolved to win his way to a better neighbourhood. But now he looked on—on till the white desert shimmered, and the shimmer rolled away in divergent rings from the eyes that pierced it, leaving a mirage framed. High park trees rustled cool about a lake—a lake in themselves, from whose green wave the sight emerged most gratefully refreshed, to stray among grouped deer, and reach a house—a palace.

Paul sighed. He broke off his attention, feeling genuinely moved to rush forth and aid Ray Stepney in his search for the *passe-partout* to these splendid prospects of home on the face of the world. He had been born and bred on the face, and certainly, by contrast with that, this looked as well as felt like the seamy side. He recollected what had passed on the dreadful morning when the *passe-partout* became so painfully conspicuous for its absence. "Uncle," he had said, "I am going to find it."

"You need not trouble to come back without it," said his uncle, facing him before. He recollected, also, his uncle's words before the key was lost, to the effect that its presence locked out all idea of a profession. He might "dabble" in art if he liked—no harm in that. He had dabbled to some purpose; now to see the result, whether it could obliterate those park trees.

He returned to the studio, stripped off a dust-sheet, and stared earnestly at the unfinished work, the first-fruits of his full-fledged ambition.

A tired ballet-girl was sitting in a rough corner behind the scenes, nursing a baby. A ragged shawl hung down over one tight-stockinged leg and satin slipper, the other shone resplendent between the shawl and a shabbily dressed nurse-child gazing wonder-struck at a star-tipped wand that lay on the dusty floor. The mother's ringless left hand told its own story, but her face was full of love.

"'Compensation!'" exclaimed Paul, slapping his leg. "And I thought of a couplet! 'Compensation'—of course it is! one word of a title. This illustrates an idea, and not a poem."

He whistled his satisfaction, and fell to work, adding a tiny caterpillar to the shawl beneath a rumpled buttercup with bright

flowers, clasped by the baby's hand against its mother's bare neck; and then a moth fluttering its wings against a dingy globe that loomed in the dark background behind a gush of light from the stage. In ten minutes these emblems were just sufficiently perceptible, and the artist's interest began to flag; perhaps the trees that might one day have been his were getting into the picture. He looked at his watch, and impatiently blessed the model who was to have come at eight to sit for the bare arms and shoulders.

"'Compensation!'" muttered Paul; "is it? is it?"

The housekeeper tapped at the door.

"Please, a young person sent as a substitute by Miss Withers, who cannot come this morning, being ill a-bed."

"A substitute!" The testy exclamation was checked, and the artist bowed abstractedly as the young person came in veiled, and paused quietly at his elbow, looking on.

"Please to make ready and sit down," said the artist, pointing his brush at a chair placed sideways before the window. "We have only forty minutes. I must leave here at nine. Now, the right arm bent, if you please, as in the picture. Why, you haven't——"

The model had taken off her hat, but nothing more, and from her chair was looking quietly out of the window. When she turned, Paul stopped, and after meeting her eyes, searched round the room with a bewildered air, as if the focus of its expression had changed, and he saw it all for the first time. He heard her speaking in a tone that sounded too harsh, explaining that she thought it was for the face. Miss Withers was a neighbour, a sort of friend——

“You are not a professional?” interrupted Paul, with a quick glance.

“Oh no!”

Here was a change of tone, indeed! He looked again, and finding her attention out of doors, his eyes set thirstily, longing to paint in a sort of hair-trigger gaze ready to fly off at the faintest symptom of detection. Her father had been well-to-do sometimes, but was poor now. She had known artists and professional models in London and elsewhere, and knew that some of them would sit for anything. But, indeed, Miss Withers had only mentioned the face.

The face was already there on the canvas; so far as it was concerned, the model's presence was absolutely useless. The canvas face was one of ruined beauty, where want and love struggled

together beneath the mockery of paint. The living face, though pale and too easily startled—how different! It was the face of a peaceful home, launched out of its sphere, and set in the shocks of a battle. Paul caught its pathetic appeal that he would vindicate Miss Withers, and suddenly from head to foot he was all one tingle of shame. He anathematised Miss Withers with absurd bitterness, and in the same breath as absurdly blessed her for having sent so much more than a substitute. Then screening confusion behind the canvas, he found the living face shining as imperfections in the painted one. Dear, dear! How stupid! He had done that face all wrong. It was too late to alter, but he did not say so. No; he took up his palette and pretended to fall to work, bending low when he caught the lightning of a glance, and doing strange things with his brushes; staring eagerly, with suspended hand and breath, when concussion played harmlessly through the window.

It was a strange element. Art did not easily learn to move there freely; the artist did. He tried his wings, and after a blundering flight or two, found their proper use. Soon he felt competent to play the part of an instructor. He shrank no longer when the ethereal fire darted through him; he learnt to breathe it freely, and

courted it, and loved it, waiting for nothing but a consort to bear him company to the seventh heaven.

So conversational flights became easier as the pretence of work proceeded, though at first the conversation itself had been but a sorry pretence. He learnt that her name was Underhill. Yes, and—Eunice? a foreign name, surely? Yes, her mother had been a foreigner. She spoke of her parents eloquently, especially of the one who had been so well-to-do “sometimes.” If a frame should be wanted for that picture, her father could make one; if anything was broken, he could mend it; he was most expert with his hands.

“Miss Underhill,” said Paul abruptly, “is your father a very big man?”

She nodded, and he shuddered.

“And could he—does he—sometimes” (here the speaker cleared his throat)—“could he repair a musical instrument?”

Paul nearly dropped his brushes—for he saw it coming, and sheltered behind his work as if assent had been the muzzle of a gun. He thought of Ray Stepney, he thought of the police. Good heavens! how hard he urged his tortured thoughts, drawing a paint-stained cuff across his forehead, and trying to grasp all ways and

means at once. Thank heaven, there yet was time to save this girl before her father was found—before he was *lost*—with the Druish violin in his possession. No other object remained than to save her, and no cost stood in its way for a single moment.

“Miss Underhill,” began Paul, stepping back, still intent upon his picture, “do you think if I called on your father he would give me leave to try your face on a fresh canvas — three sittings?”

She looked at him in surprise, for his voice sounded strange; then coloured and looked away, then back again, with eyes that rested on his face implicitly.

“I am sure he would,” she answered. “We are poor. I shall be only too happy to do whatever I can to help him.”

“Then I’ll go at once.”

The palette being thrown down announced the close of the sitting. Miss Underhill glanced at the clock, reproaching its mendacity, but Paul was radiant. He felt perfectly satisfied of his ability to protect the young lady from the danger that threatened her father. He was her champion, and cost and difficulty only made the position shine brighter. Farewell to the allurements of Safington: if they furnished a

claim upon her father they were sold well; and the prospect of seeing her again threw a glory like sunrise over the world.

While pinning on her hat the young lady came round to look again at the picture, beside which the artist stood talking gaily. All at once she stooped to catch the light on the tell-tale face. Well might she flush as she flashed off a swift glance, half guilty, half reproachful, wholly conscious! But Paul laughed audaciously, and returned the look with interest.

"By Jove! but I have, though," he said in answer to the mute comment. "I've done a lot."

"It is a beautiful picture," murmured Eunice shyly, drawing down her veil. "What do you intend to call it?"

"Oh! 'Compensation,'" replied Paul decisively—" 'Compensation,' without a shadow of a doubt."

V

VARIATIONS

IN one corner a bed and a rickety washstand, and on the other side of the littered floor a rough work-bench running the width of the room, whose veranda doors were thereby effectually blocked. It was a front room in a detached one-storeyed wooden cottage situated in a degenerate suburb composed of family likenesses, all detached, all one-storeyed, all more or less ant-eaten within, and painted with incipient barnacles without, all gritty-grit ingrained that no scrubbing could eradicate, all differing only in degree from positive forlornness to superlative, and a very striking percentage of them empty.

Old Dyce Underhill had been sitting motionless at his work-bench for quite a long while. Judging by the appearance of the room he must have been having a busy time of it, for the surplus population of the bench had colonised even the bed and the washstand with miscellaneous implements and materials. Strips of moulding,

bottles of gold paint, glue, size, enamels, colours, wires, glass, all mixed with stray tools, stray nails, and scraps of all sorts, and heaped together as if they had boiled over from the crowded shelves above the bench. Stay, though! here were traces of impatience rather than of industry. A few articles of crystal and china mended with rivets had been huddled into corners, and the centre of the bench cleared, summarily, round a violin.

It was an old, rich, mellow-looking instrument, and a poor old man was looking at it—hard. By degrees his heavy brows had sunk, of their own weight, and his sunken lips set in a sharp, bitter smile. Paul Druish, or any other artist, peeping through the window would have found a picture in that room. The signs of toil, the huge frame of the old man who lived and slept among them—poor old giant! worn—nearly worn out with his seventy years; yes, his smile would have been eloquent through that frail, dainty shell, lying on velvet without a single scratch to mar the contrast. “A hundred and fifty years old,” would have pointed the moral.

Alas! for the skin-depth of beauty when art plays the gilder to wooden facts! The touching picture must have left untouched all but the surface shape on which it glowed.

A barely perceptible sound roused the old

man from his brown study. He started up instantly, with watchful eyes and ears strained towards the door, and hands extended in act to seize the violin and hide it away.

"Eunice," he whispered — such a cavernous whisper was in effect a call — "Una, is that you?"

"Yes, father." Never did music soften a rugged face. The old man sat him down again, and looked almost kind.

Eunice had brought a letter, which he took quickly, tore open in formidable haste, and scowled over, deciphering the few salient words of the crabbed penmanship, then shredded the paper up and strewed it round him.

"Just in time," he said. The room looked smaller when he rose to his feet, and the effect upon his daughter was almost that of distance. As the towering form moved about her, she receded, shrinking back through time or space to a mere child or a distant figure.

Just in time for what? He did not tell her to go, and she had something to say; moreover, her father's movements made her wonder; but had she known their import, neither the urgency of the message, nor anything short of a direct command, would have made her linger.

He had laid the violin upon a pillow in the centre

of the bed, and by the aid of a geometrical measure was marking two points upon its surface. Then he unlocked a steel trunk with a patent key, and after some groping produced a long sheath-knife. This he adjusted carefully, and with a mallet drove through the violin, with a succession of sharp taps, until nearly an inch of the long-pointed blade projected through the maple back. Then he locked up the knife, touched up its handiwork with sand-paper wrapped round a thin slip of steel, smiled upon it with grim satisfaction, and looked meaningly at his daughter.

No more room for doubt then—she knew what he had done. The sight of the pierced violin had made her shiver at a ghastly likeness, but that look was the thing itself.

“So, little one,” began Underhill, mercifully veiling his scorching glance in customary indifference, “you have returned. And how do you like being a model?”

“Oh, father!” exclaimed Eunice. An impatient twitch of the rugged brows warned her to stop, and she answered timidly that she liked it very well.

“He wishes to paint my face on a fresh canvas,” she added falteringly. “It is not much—three sittings, but every little helps.”

"Umph!" grunted her father ungraciously. "Our own ways are all sunshine. Not much, truly; but when I wanted you to do more in the same direction, it was—'Oh no, it would kill me!' You set your face like a flint against the stage; but as being stared at as a model is your own idea, why, you can stand it!"

"Only stared at by one," began the girl eagerly, then lowered her eyes again beneath parental scrutiny. Her father looked at her more narrowly, and resumed—

"And only paid by one. But that's all nonsense. Hundreds will see you on canvas, the only difference being that your eyes there have not the cheek of staring back. Now Manager Blake offered liberal terms and a long engagement only for your face and voice; and though I was even worse off than now, scene daubing and shifting—shift! shift! this perdition of beggarly makeshifts!—but no, you wouldn't hear of it; and I have never heard you singing a note since. An actress—my faith! what are we all? It's in Shakespeare; if the Hebrews had had a stage, it would be in the Bible. But a model!—the inhumanest of all callings, related to nothing but statues and flesh-tints! I let you go to-day as a substitute for that fool of a Polly Withers—a milliner's block, sick of a stuffing of lollipops—

simply because I thought it would make you see your silliness about the stage. What's your voice for—what are you for, if not for a livelihood? No; you can follow your own idea of a kind action, you can earn a few shillings by being stared at in your own way, or blush out a song at a concert; but as for logic—pho!—your mother all over.”

Poor Eunice stood humble and despondent, but without a sign of giving way. Her father saw that, and when she faltered out something about Europe and America, he interrupted her rudely—

“Oh ay! there were concerts there, but you're not fit even for a milliner's dummy if you can't wear the fashions of the place. Think I didn't know what your ‘Oh, father!’ meant when you looked at that one?” (pointing sternly at the violin).

“Oh, father!” said Eunice imploringly. “You gave me a good education, and you love me, and it makes me miserable. I wish you had not come here, where I can do so little to keep you.”

The old man's eyes may have had good cause for sinking, but his daughter was mistaken in attributing their abasement to the particular charge that dimmed her own eyes with tender

reproach. Presently he laughed discordantly, long and loud, and shook his hand in triumph over the whimsical idea of poverty. Poor! he was better off than ever he had been. For all the surroundings were beggarly, he held the command of a fortune, the absolute command in his hands.

He stretched them out, opening and clenching the mighty fists in a manner that betided ill for anything coming within their grasp, and watched their movements for a long time in brooding silence, as if the little pantomime of opening and closing those iron fingers upon that fortune afforded a deep, dark satisfaction.

At length he drew in the long breath of one who returns to the surface after immersion painfully protracted.

"And so my blushing Una consents to have her fortune painted, does she?" he broke out, with harsh, abrupt jocularity. "And who may the favoured sprig be whose eyes are endurable?"

A lash could not have stung the old man into a more sudden fury, for at the mention of the artist's name he struck his fists against the chair and lifted himself out of it with a violence that shook the room. He did not say anything; his voice he restrained until over the glare of savage-



ness in his eyes, and over his whole face, had stolen the more dangerous light of triumph. Then he began moving restlessly about, and reasoning with his passion inarticulately: Paul Druish—blast him! why couldn't he sign plainer? So, that was the man. "Well, I knew he was out here. I knew he was a painter. This comes of being a nightbird; but that babbling Withers keeping the name a secret! Is it a plot?" He stopped, and laid a deeply reflective hand over the violin that lay on the bench. "Paul Druish!" he thought. "Here I have him. Blast him, body and soul! my girl shall marry him!"

It was a stroke of masterly triumph whichever way he looked at it, this idea of utilising the fame and fortune of a hated family for the benefit of his own. He struck his fist on the bench and laughed till he roared—laughed till he shook and heaved with eruptive merriment, that must have been fatal to any thorax less heroically ribbed than his own.

"Mrs. Druish!" he gasped; and over and over again. "You shall have it all. You shall marry him."

Eunice was accustomed to her father's gusty ways, but this was too tempestuous, too stormy; she would have been terrified had she not been so deeply offended, offended and wondering and

apprehensive all at once. With increasing efforts she tried to stem the torrent; her dark eyes now showing a gleam of resentment, now a glow of shame set in earnest expostulations, and now fear—not wholly on her own account, however. Mr. Druish would be coming presently to arrange about her portrait. “For shame, father! Father, what does it mean?”

“Mean!” echoed her father breathlessly. “Why, you gaby, I thought you guessed. See here.” With feverish haste he thrust his long arm far up the whitewashed chimney, and from a high receptacle produced a black bag containing an exact duplicate of the violin upon the bench. He shuffled the two about side by side with hands that seemed to itch for violence, and glared upon them despotically. Now did she understand? Now did she guess? Now did she know what it meant?

Sure never was a gentle maiden afflicted with a parent more “trying” than Dyce Underhill. Poor Eunice could only shake her head faintly, and press her hand over her heart, knowing that whatever the mystery might be, it was certain to prove terrible. Well might the old lion call her Una; but this Una, being Eunice and his daughter, had not the trick of clipping the lion’s claws; she could only stand and helplessly watch



him ferociously toying until the cruel paws were tired.

"Gaby!" he said again in high good-humour. "So you really thought I had taken all these pains to furbish up a counterfeit—this, in order to keep what already belongs as much to me as to the person who left it in my hands! That reminds me: Taske—you remember the man who brought this genuine article for repairs?—to me!—ha, ha!—and you object to the stage! The police are after him. He has got to make tracks with his fiddle. He can't stop till the job is finished. *Sacre nom!*—as if I could commit sacrilege by healing up this relic!" (He snatched up one of the instruments and kissed it passionately.) "If Taske should come after nightfall, when I am away—you saw where I got the black bag from—give him the one in the chimney. Do you understand that clearly? Ah! you are a poor hand at a riddle."

With a quick movement of impatience he turned from his daughter and rummaged out the long sheath-knife again, drew it, and deliberately fitted its murderous point into the duplicate gashes in the duplicate violins, transfixing Eunice the while with a smile of terrible enlightenment, whereat she gave a gasp and clasped her hands.

"Oh, father! it's the Druish violin."

He cut the sentence short with a sweep of the knife, turned pale, and listened, and did not recover his firmness until, moving on tiptoe, he had hurriedly locked up both the knife and the notorious instrument that should be nameless, and had pushed the box that held them far under the bed.

So, she had found it! Well, yes; that was the same knife, and this the same hand that had carved out the history she must have heard dozens of times. Taske was the man who had stolen the instrument; this young artist, Druish, was the man who suffered for the theft; unless as the husband of Eunice he should never regain his inheritance—never—never. Only to enrich her should this heirloom, this accursed shield that had stood between a fearful name and vengeance, be returned to the family. With a horrible imprecation the old man swore it, with a second oath he bade his daughter sit down. Did she also condemn him unheard? did she also look upon him as a would-be assassin, a common thief, who, fifty years ago, as a boy of eighteen, attacked an unarmed man for the sake of plunder? Though the charge had never been made in a court of justice, for fifty years it had weighed upon him heavily, and kept him all

his life at arm's length from society, an uncertified outlaw, a borderer with a sword ready for both sides—yes, even latterly, while trying to turn a clean leaf for his daughter's sake. Let her sit down; she did not yet know what it meant.

“Mean!” reiterated the old man, blazing out in another passion through all his weariness. “Just God! what means it not! Before was nothing—dreams of painted fire that could not burn; and after there is nothing left to add. This *is* meaning—whole—complete—meaning that weighs me to my knees with sudden knowledge that all who have died on the yesterdays of all generations could know nothing of special providence. Suppose I had been dragged away—not yesterday—not an hour ago—just God! this fifty years’ ripening had been barren time to me. It means that one who very shortly will never write another eight to his age—never—the life I led has worn out all the others, and iron follows suit with flesh and blood. Had it come a little sooner, had this fortune dropped but ten years sooner—well, well, it shall make the last scene a rich one. And to you, fortunate child! wealth, honour, prosperity all your life. Think what it means when the family that wronged us is brought back to make restitution.

The blow bears golden fruit, never to lips more parched. Thank heaven, your artist friend must be thirsty too! Thank heaven, child, for his need, for your looks, for all! Just God! you were right, and I was wrong; the instrument I have been blaspheming through all these years was Thine own golden hand."

Eunice was sobbing; her father also sobbed, though for a very different reason. His great frame shook like a leaf before a gust of rapture so much greater and stronger; and when he spoke again, the broken sentences passed by unheeded. It was not until afterwards that his wild and whirling references to restitution and special providence were furnished with a clue.

When all the world, or this particular corner of it, was young and irresponsible, buoyant and wayward, no name stood higher among its pastoral holdings than that of a great station known as Cocagne. Cocagne in sweet suggestiveness, teeming with wool and beef what time its animated torrents rolled together on to the pothery stockyard or the greasy shearing-shed. As the eye of a noted district, all the colony had learnt to quote Cocagne, and to envy the squatter.

What, then, of the squatter's only son, whose prospective wealth, though blinding to the public

gaze, shone but as specks on the gold of every-day? Sun spots, and he was dazzled—alas! alas!—she too. She had lifted herself as a wild-flower to his lordly stooping, until cheered by the caress of gold, unblurred, undepressed by dew, the humble eye looked up steady and wide, and by the sun's own light learnt to love the sun. No prettier blossom could be found, though you searched through that colony's public from end to end, than the one set in rustic simplicity beneath pastoral magnificence, and owing its perfume to the selector's daughter.

Her father, a widower, grew old but to work and make money. In all the world there was only a younger brother, with whom she lived as mother and sister too (and as mother and sister he loved her)—only just one boy to guard great beauty set in a passionate latitude, and watch with jealousy the growing preference of a stranger. The lordly apparition, the fine dress, the blood-horse with its plated trappings, the blandishments, from the first day of their coming the boy hated them—hated them in their sidelong grey dawn of interest—hated them as the interest grew distinct—hated them as a thought of colour stirred, timidly flickered, fell, and rose, and burned, in the augury of a tropical aurora.

But first—but first many a tender scene had

come to pass in hallowed homestead nooks that lived as monuments of fidelity, first of all, for a little while, before the flowers of love's trysting-places disclosed a hissing head. Family pride took arms at the threat of a *mesalliance* whispered in its ears by jealousy—child's love, never counting the cost of keeping its treasure to itself, meaning to clip a wing, but the knife slipped. Then lover's love had to choose, and of alternatives clung to figures, to the birthright of a squatter, not that of a man. Rather than bask in golden sunshine, it would grovel over prospects of golden sovereigns. And truth and honour and all life's golden verses, set to the adroit sweet chiming of constancy, fell out without one effort to persevere, clashing with the eternity they were hymning.

The bygone lover passed to a wraith's existence in a land of grey fogs, numbing all he touched with the breath of winter, the palpable glitter he had chosen, that it might shower on him in bitter rime and frost. Behind him hung the flowers, maimed memories stripped from remembrance, and left blackening in death's highway alone with neglect. But though the one year that trod them down began treading their final hillock, also, flush with our green sea-level, never has that grave been forgotten by the blind



mole jealousy that was its sexton. In it lay the bigotry of a fiercely exclusive devotion, the ashes to ashes of its fire ; and from it proceeded corruption, hatred, hovering in the air over thoughts of vengeance as unattainable as a rainbow.

VI

A TOUR DE FORCE

A DOWNHILL streak of harsh, loose gravel and disintegrated road-metal bedded in floury dust. Bare feet could not have moved silently, nor iron-shod ones in comfort, upon such a road, which in conformation bore far more resemblance to an inchoate pudding of the Great Stone period waiting for yonder shower to make it dough. The street (for so it ranked in this Little Wooden Age) was sheeted in semi-darkness, suggestive of faint twilight or thin dawn rather than full night, by reason of the moon's majesty, though nearly round and high overhead, being sulking deep in clouds. The massed shadows varied—the light did not seem to vary—ebbing and flowing in fluctuating degrees of grey; sometimes hardly disclosing black blocks of houses and black blots of trees; at other times, when a slatch of rain had fallen, threading themselves in phantom filminess over slopes of corrugated iron.

It was a side street in a degenerate suburb long left behind—whole years ago—by the rapid march of improvements into their vasty field. Viewed from the advantages of its upper end, the side street dwindled down to a show of models standing at ease in neglect, as embodying forms of villa residences that had ceased to be desirable. Disorder was rampant in the liliputian rows; their members stood for the most part upon narrow slips of land—penn'orths that came from some higgler, not the original syndicate, surely (or could you find, in these days, suburban blocks parcelled out like cemeteries?)—but none of them was content with the disunion from next door proclaimed by mere fences. No, the fences might tumble down, and welcome (and *did*), but by form, colour, attitude, position, and every other means within its power, each cottage took extraordinary pains to turn cold shoulders upon the idea of being connected, however remotely, with anything else whatever in the universe. And if independence was rampant, dishabille was chronic; so there needs no apology for making the acquaintance of that side street under cover of night.

It was not late, but what with the weather and what with the mosquitoes, attractions were all indoors. A feeble show of second-class

illuminants venturing at intervals from open doors or uncurtained windows up and down the deserted road, though equal to nothing else, triumphantly demonstrated that the neighbourhood was not a busy one; while the many black gaps intervening were equally luminous with the fact of sparse population.

Halfway down the street was an inhabited cottage, whose looks should have been relegated to the very bottom, the lowest place of all. As if conscious of bowed eaves and general decrepitude, the tenement stood modestly back behind the flanks of two empty houses, veiling its one spark of audacity, a glimmering window, with several haphazard shrubs in the strip of front garden. A pepperina expanded its timely umbrella over the footpath, the veranda railings were lashed together with passion vines, and the front of the house so bemuffled and barricaded by shadows that even the glimmering window could hardly be seen without manœuvring.

Oh, for a flash of lightning from those spongy heavens, for the bull's-eye of night, or the search-light of day turned full—*here*—to show what an avalanche of manœuvres did depend from mere luminous spider threads! There was scarcely a ray that threaded frutescent crannies whose other end was not lost in a gleaming eye.



Another pelting shower is making the iron hum over the emptiness of a cottage on the other side of the way as a shadow comes stealing in from the back of the allotment, and pauses to reconnoitre. It is a square-built shadow, indomitably buttoned up in a dark coat surmounted by a hat that looks ready to do or die—with pleasure. Hush! Not a whisper save the rain. All still, all deserted; but the shadowy hat, projecting round a wooden corner, turns intently towards a Moreton Bay fig near the garden palings. The polished reflectors of the leaves overhead refract every ghost of a glimmer, thus preserving blackness inviolable underneath. Is it fancy, then, or does the blackness hold a crouching blot blacker still? does it move? is it fancy, or is it a man stooping to meet a cheering ray from the opposite window, and so intently using his gleaming eye that he cannot hear discreet signals? The shadow steals forward again, and lays a hand lightly upon the shoulder of the blot. He feels it start; and then another hand that touches his own quickly, while accents of relief hoarsely whisper his name.

“No news, I suppose?” whispers the blot, after making the new-comer crouch as he is doing behind the palings.

The shadow shakes his head.

"No, none. I did not keep your men long after you had gone. We only inquired at two or three more stations, then back on a luggage train. Of course I am dead set on hunting up that Taske, but I quite agree with you that he can wait. We know Underhill here has the violin. You recognised him as the man who tried to steal it at Lockthorpe?"

"I did so, sir. I recognised him at once, though I'd never set eyes on him," replies the blot vaingloriously. "He's a marked man of his inches, a dangerous cross between an eel and an elephant is Underhill, and, as you may suppose by his giving me the slip, none so green in the horn. Oh, Mr. Stepney! to think of me being here to recognise him again! It's been the dream of my life, sir, that violin has. It's not only because no article missing in the wide world at this present moment has a tithe of the money on its head: the money will make me as a man, perhaps; but the fame, the notoriety, will make me as——"

"Hold hard there," interrupted the shadow sternly. "You showed a flash of intelligence once, and became famous. Now I intend to reap a little by the same process. You will have the goodness to recollect that this second adventure



has been thrown into my hands. You may say that I have sufficient motive in serving a friend who has been practically disinherited because he lost this fiddle. Not so fast. I found where the fiddle was, and I employed you. You are welcome to the reward for your services, but the honour and glory—no, no—my share.”

“I’ll reflect from you, sir,” said the blot politely, and his companion laughed good-naturedly.

The blot was evidently in a teeth-chattering state of excitement. A burglary, still pre-eminent, after baffling all the detectives in the world for three years or more, had cropped up within his grasp. Moreover, for the advancement of his glory, the Druish Strad had been traced home, just as he could have wished if he had dared, to the very hands that laid the foundation of its history long ago. The same motive—pique—that made his companion thirst to unearth Taske, made the detective quiver to come to grips with Underhill, the man in whose hands Taske had left the fiddle for repairs. An outsider would have found something ludicrous in the fortune that had brought a wooden knife wound to be healed by the very man who had inflicted it; but to one who knew the circumstances, who was swept up by personal interest into their magic

circle, there was nothing to laugh at. The Druish Strad was not a fiddle to him—it was a fortune, for whose recovery a bereaved nobleman offered thousands and thousands of pounds; and Underhill, the mysterious and gigantic criminal who had evaded justice, threw Taske, the real thief, into the shade. Every nerve in the detective nature yearned to shut home the theft upon Underhill. Though seemingly crouching here behind the fence, the man really stood on tiptoe, overlooking Taske, ignoring Taske altogether, and concentrated heart and soul upon Underhill. There was the suspect who had been associated with the Druish Strad all along. Never was a grander case than could be made out of finding that heirloom in his hands after all these years. Good heavens! why spoil such a work of art with Taske? It was Vandalism. To fasten the teeth of the case upon Underhill, had been the detective's sole aim; they were many, they were sharp, and at last he saw them closing. Exultation broke out over this fact when he was asked for news in his turn.

"You see those trees?" he said, pointing to Underhill's garden. "There's hardly a one of them does not conceal a man."

"Then what are you waiting for?"

"Ah, sir, you don't know Underhill as well



as I do. If a violin was cast iron, it would be but a shell to him. We must make sure. Now Underhill, it seems, went out soon after sundown shadowed by all the men then present, except one. *He* made his report to me when I came about an hour ago in the washhouse. And still, sir—still there is a man and a woman in those premises; their shadows have been seen on the blind, and to such a pitch has our profession come, that a man's shadow can be told from a woman's by any member of the force, if it's only the heads seen, both equally clean shaved. Well, *he* must be watched out; and if our swag hasn't been found on Underhill, it may be found on him before he can break it, or, at any rate, we can then enter and make the most of our search-warrant. By the way, sir, have you seen your friend young Mr. Druish to-day?"

"No. Called this evening, but he was out. I say, should you think this second fellow might be Taske?"

The detective almost spoke aloud in scouting the idea. Depend upon it, from the moment he left that instrument in Underhill's hands, Taske was "out of it." Why, bless you! they were the very last hands in the world to give it up, the very last hands that would have been trusted had they been known.

Here an impatient movement warned the speaker that he was giving offence in thus pitting his man, Underhill, against the other's favourite criminal, Taske. He adroitly veered round again to the young artist Paul Druish, and murmured in dulcet reminiscence—

“Ah, poor young fellow! To think of us meeting here again—all us chief actors. It's a heavenly fairy-tale. Probably you are not acquainted with the splendid estate young Mr. Druish forfeited when he lost this instrument we are after? They were out-and-out big bugs at Safington, I can tell you that; and shall be again, sir—my reputation upon it. This Underhill shan't slip a second time, for every individual spare hand, far or wide, is now centring round him. There's a cordon of men round that place, sir, as thick as a hedge—quite a cordon of men.”

“Hope they'll all act in concert then,” responded the shadow shortly; “and let's hope the concert will start before we grow mouldy.”

Then as the thinning rain began whispering silence he left his companion, beyond the reach of temptation to speak.

Hush! the whispering passes upwards, trailing its skirts into space. Attention for the concert; here is the audience set, with eyes strained thirstily

to the golden light, the promise of fame and fortune; that is the theme of eager expectancy, no other piece will serve—the songs of angels might breathe through the vast of night, and all space find pulses in a hover of harps celestial without one single note being heard. To these ears for music all preceding pieces are merely a tuning process for the rattling, clattering wind-up of the programme.

Andante. The first movement was over long ago, with its ruminations over two meditative themes. The young artist, Paul Druish, had resolved to save the father of his beloved. He knew that Underhill had private reasons for shunning the light of inquiry, and that the auger eye of Scotland Yard must bore him through and through if he was found, however innocently, with such an heirloom as the Druish violin in his possession. To warn the father, Paul came with a heaven-sent excuse of painting Eunice's sweet face—three sittings; and lo! the three sittings had passed all in one, so far as time was concerned, and still Underhill had not returned from his shady business (whatever it might be) in the town, nor had the artist found courage to warn the daughter of danger that was threatening her father. How could he warn her, how could he look in the eyes he loved, and say—

smirching a handful of soil on an angel's wing to rub out a little stain and leave a large one—

“Miss Underhill, a family heirloom of ours, that once saved a rich man's life from your father's hand, has been stolen. As its loss to my family means a mint of money, a huge reward has been offered, and before I knew you, an enthusiastic friend of mine came to me declaring that he could trace it. Now since I have known you the loss to me has mattered very little; but before you set the seal on compensation by giving to worldly objects, not their own fox-fire, nor yet our mundane flares, but the light of day—in short, before I knew you I told this friend that he could please himself whether he went in quest of the heirloom or not. Is it not here? Bid your father escape; the police are coming, and I know he has cause to dread them.”

The young artist blamed himself, or circumstances, bitterly for letting love thus stand in its own light. The idea of warning had come from love in the first instance, and now love waved it back. A despot's finger is a despot; there was no resisting. Love has his own way or none at all, and every particle of that timeless interview was his subject by right divine. Even looks



were his, though they claimed to be free on the strength of an artistic passport. The artist used his privilege to the utmost; but he did not see the face; he saw love only, and painted it to the chaotic life.

For a long, unreckoned interval silence remained unbroken, only disturbed by remarks that passed without notice. The artist became embarrassed by the silence, for he thought it reflected upon the unconscionable length of his stay. He had fidgeted disastrously with his work, until it no longer possessed a merit to pursue. He had reiterated a wish to see Mr. Underhill on business until the very clock took to sarcasm, and still his fair companion sat intent upon distance, or forced irrelevant replies through the problems in which she was rapt.

More, far more than "wealth, fortune, prosperity" all her life. That keen old night-hawk, her father, must have shrewdly suspected how the land lay when he so confidently declared that Paul should marry Una. Una felt love in the air. It would be as easy for her to marry a rising artist, as for the Druish Strad to make them both rich when married. But at the same time, if Paul were reinstated as a bachelor in his high position, how could he marry a poor picture-framer's daughter? He must then comply

with interests inimical to Underhill, though fully as arbitrary. The prospect of parental fury—the high-tide of policy flowing on to assured success, suddenly undermined by heroics, and sent headlong raving into a pit. The metaphor looked by no means exaggerated, yet it was not so vivid and so terrible as the inevitable result of the heroics upon Paul Druish.

Love had been in the air, but at the first sound of the Druish Strad it vanished. How could poor Una know that what represented supreme sacrifice to her, affected Paul merely as a means of saving her father from criminal proceedings? It cut her to the heart, with a foretaste of her worst fears, to see how eagerly he caught up the prize when it had been unearthed from the littered workshop, how he exulted over it, and hid it under his coat, and hurried away as if there was nothing more on earth to wish for.

“I am lost!” thought Una; and her candle showed nothing but ruins, scattered ruins, remnants, waste that could never be used as material, or used at all.

“Brave girl! she has let me save her,” thought Paul, chuckling his way up the street in high satisfaction. “She suspects that the thing was stolen before it came to her father, and that he would get into trouble if it was found in his



hands. I wronged those eyes in thinking they could see nothing but innocence ; they have seen all that is necessary to-night. Now, Mr. Stepney, come on, and do your worst ! ”

He waved the prize over his head, and laughed aloud. And next moment Mr. Stepney had taken him at his word. Paul’s heart gave one thump at the thought of Underhill as something heavy leapt the paling and grappled with him ; then he saw how the land lay, and shook off the hands of assailants, as if they had been pack-thread, with a burst of laughter.

“ Why, Druish ! ” gasped the foremost, in dismay. “ Stealing your own property, and a march on us all ! ” He too laughed. “ What a sell ! ” Willing to transfer a share to other shoulders, he shouted, “ Here he is. Come on ! ”

Several feet were scattering the gravel in desperate haste, and a sanguine voice was firing blank cartridges of congratulation in honour of a suppositious triumph : “ Well done ! Has he got it ? Hold on—here’s bracelets. I knew he could not slip a second time.”

“ What, Mr. D. ! ” exclaimed Paul facetiously, as Underhill’s official enemy came puffing up.

The detective stopped to swear ; and on all his men the disappointment of finding their prize in rightful hands reflected so keenly that Paul made

them a short consolatory speech : though criminals dissolved in water or air, it was clear they had secured the main object of their search ; and in his own name he promised that the pipers should be paid. Meantime they might take possession of the recovered property, until it could be restored to its setting at Safington.

In gloomy silence the procession was formed, of ponderous orderly feet in double pairs before, and behind the chief detective bearing a blue baize bag. With a weighty parade of iron-tired Juggernaut justice, dear to the badge, they marched in state before the peering eyes of wondering households, repudiating defeat as they trampled the gravel so inflexibly, that Paul was tempted to launch after them a few bars of "We stood on the Bridge at Midnight," whereat the bag carrier ground between his teeth more hard things than his escort beneath their feet.

"Why, Druish," exclaimed the first assailant, who was really more disappointed than any of the others, "what's the meaning of all this? We roll up in our thousands to win back your kingdom in a grim encounter, and out you pop laughing, and single-handed, with the latchkey! Unriddle."

"I don't think the answer inhabits your voca-

bulary at present," replied his friend gravely. "Come to my rooms, and there I will speak of forces that leave you and your muscular squad where the time that's coming will leave dynamite."

VII

ACCIDENTALS

“ANOTHER counterfeit! evidently constructed line for line beside the genuine instrument, by some one diabolically ingenious, but unacquainted with private marks, dimensions, weights, unknown to me, alas! by which that lunatic’s trustees can recognise real Simon Pure. What do you mean by it? Is not my position trying enough, in spite of coal-pits, without these eternal counterfeits? I thought I had seen the last of them. So discreditable, too; resemblance that fairly took my breath; deliberate attempt to defraud by some one who must know the Druish Strad better than I even. I suppose you painted it life-size, and gave daub to your confederates for copy. Once for all, I denounce this as mere insult to injury—insane quackery. If it is a photograph, you might try the microscope.”

A young man had retired to an out-of-the-way corner, screened from the vault of a cheerless goods-shed by a wall of packing-cases, to study

the above communication. The shed was lofty and obscure; such crepuscular beams as forced their way in through the sky-twilights hung about the prison of the roof, seemingly too much exhausted by the effort to reach the pavement, though it was raised some three or four feet to meet them above the level of the street; such genuine daylight as the place could boast flowed through the entrances of two square stone bays, into which carts could be backed to receive their lading, if necessary, from three sides at once.

The walled-off corner where the young man sat could not have been sought as a reading-room except by mental eyes driven to treat noxious obscurity as a substance soluble in excess. For this experiment it was an admirable corner. A voluminous brand on the up-ended box whereon the student was perched looked like a mere ghost of "Stepney & Co. — Mixed" — something — "6 doz. — London." A second box, that formed a rest for his feet, dimly suggested, "Exporters — 6 — Assd. — *Jam* — Stepney & Co."

And there sat Stepney & Co., or its representative on this side the world, forlornly cast away among these isolated Babylonian bricks of dynastic greatness, intently puzzling over characters that presented nothing in common with native cuneiform.

“Another counterfeit!” One needed to be a mental boa-constrictor to grasp such a text, and to assimilate the sermon that followed. A counterfeit! another counterfeit! If not dyspepsia, what might the word signify in the vernacular? But first for the significance of a message so long and so ample being transmitted by cable instead of by post. Was it a coded message? Clearly not. Then why should a man whose financial position (“in spite of coal-pits”) was “trying,” show such a lavish regardlessness of expense? Clearly because the counterfeit was so exact as to suggest a wild hope that it had been copied from the life. A photograph! nonsense. The young man on the up-ended box clenched his fist fiercely upon the paper, and groaned aloud as he thought of all the time that had been wasted in transmitting the counterfeit to England.

“Oh, that Taske! What fools we were to think the old thief a nonentity!”

With these words upon the lips of his mind, young Stepney sought the manager of the establishment in which he was supposed to be learning the ways of his paternal house, Stepney & Co., in the Antipodes.

“Mr. Mason,” he said triumphantly, “I was right, and that wretched detective was wrong after all. Taske is the man I thought him.”

The manager looked up from his work with a shade of annoyance.

"Oh! meaning that affair of a violin or something you were so interested in a month or two ago?"

"Of course. The Druish Strad. You remember I stumbled across the man who had stolen it, and found that he had left it with a man named Underhill for repairs. Underhill's daughter, I suppose, because she found the police were coming, handed it over by the virtue of necessity to Mr. Druish——"

"One moment," interposed the manager mildly. "By Mr. Druish you mean a young man who is at present carrying on business as an artist, or something, over on Merino Road? I know, I know—I wish I knew my catechism half as well. It is very curious and unusual, no doubt, that a fiddle should have a lot of money left it, or attached to its preservation as an heirloom; but in my case, putting myself in your friend Mr. Druish's position, if I had been stupid enough to lose a thing of such importance, and found myself without regular occupation—no office hours to bind me—where there was a chance of winning it back, hanged if I should have wanted help from any outsider. However unbusiness-like, I should have jumped at that one chance. And

pray, Mr. Stepney, do you be business-like too. You have wasted a lot of time and trouble on what cannot be any concern of yours, unless you take what these people may offer for your services."

"Read that," said Stepney.

The manager took the proffered cablegram with an air of protest.

"Wilson," he called to some one in the next room, "let me know when the vanman comes for those twelve cases for the *Austral*. What's this? A counterfeit! Well, it's as I told you. You have neglected your business for another person's concerns, and now you've got your labour for your pains."

The manager was a mild man, of artless manners abroad, that were hung up with his coat when he entered the office. He looked up from the cablegram with a schoolmaster's eye—superior experience; but the culprit squared himself unabashed, confronting censure with the advantage of everything else—height, breeding, purpose, all towering in the representative of Stepney & Co. over one of the tugs and tenders beneath its walls.

The manager had no sympathies at all, and no ideas beyond the office. To him young Stepney was a fool; but when the fool calmly requested

leave of absence for an indefinite period, and the loan of a hundred pounds, the shock was paralyzing. The boy was mad, bewitched by the Druish violin. As a matter of fact, the thief, not the instrument, had bewitched him; there could be no peace of mind till the thief had been hunted down and worsted. And yet Ray Stepney did not hate Taske: he admired his audacity; he liked him. Taske shone, not as a criminal—far from it. He was an admirable man, a man of many virtues, but by an act of defiance all his virtues made him the worthier game.

The manager looked grave, and spoke of business. Here was an immense business to be learnt. Ray's father had sent him out to learn it, and thought he was learning it; and since the Druish violin came on the scene, business had been totally eclipsed, and who would have the blame, who would be held responsible? Why, clearly the manager.

It was no good. Ray's mouth only set the squarer, and his eyes glistened with the fierce light of hunting, as he thought of the open dare flung at him by a strolling fiddler, this Taske.

"I promised him I'd run him to earth if he ran away; and if you want me to buckle to, you'd

best let me go, for until I've settled scores there'll be nothing else."

"But if this kind of thing goes on all your life, what is to become of business?" queried the manager appositely. It would be very well for an unemployed person to embark his time in the manufacture of a rich friend, but Mr. Stepney had nothing to do but to qualify himself for the possession of a fortune ready-made. And then the manager recurred to his own responsibility, an insuperable stumbling-block in his eyes.

"Ray! Ray!" some one called outside; and instantly there was silence in the counting-house.

"Good gracious!" thought Ray uneasily; "is he taking it that way?" Then he turned to introduce Mr. Druish to Mr. Mason.

"Why didn't you come? Didn't you receive my message?" demanded the new-comer without taking the slightest notice of the introduction.

Ray took up the cablegram from the manager's desk, and spoke consoling words. Depend upon it, Sir Peter Parkley was right: the counterfeit had been constructed line by line beside the original instrument. Taske had the original instrument in his possession—unless, indeed, the

counterfeit was made to impose upon Taske when the original was left for repairs with Underhill.

"They're gone," exclaimed Druish, with a burst of anguish.

"Let them!" said his friend boldly. "If they are above ground we will find them, and make them refund your fortune and Sir Peter's, in the person of your uncle's heirloom. There, never mind, for I swear I'll hunt that Taske round the world——"

"Curse Sir Peter," burst out Druish, shaking a friendly hand from his arm and clenching his fists passionately. "Curse Taske and that diabolical fiddle, I wish they had gone to the devil together for firewood. Oh, Ray, come and advise me, for goodness' sake, for I am distracted! Such a letter! Did not you see my message on the back of the envelope? Did not you guess what it was that made these weeks seem slow? Good God! he will be murderous. I must tell you what schemes are routed for him by this counterfeit—*his* schemes! *his* feelings!—and you thought I shared them! All seemed going well, and I thought to surprise you with a bit of heaven on earth; but now, unless all is done at once—at once, Stepney—at once— Don't fail me now."

"A love affair," was Stepney's sagacious comment; and taking his friend by the arm, he endeavoured to draw him away. He understood enough from this conclusion to make him think lugubriously of his projected Taske hunt. Evidently Underhill, knowing that his daughter loved Paul Druish, had been consoled thereby for the loss of the Druish violin. Better that his daughter should have placed it in Paul's hands than that its restoration should be due to the police. Assured of the tender links that bound his fortune to a musical talisman, Underhill had been waiting for the tide of better days to set in from Safington upon his prospective son-in-law—only to find the talisman a counterfeit, and better days a dream.

Paul Druish set himself back against the hand that sought privacy for his trouble. He seemed unable to move a step without more effectual assistance than one hand could guarantee.

"Don't fail me now," he repeated pathetically. "A hundred heads and hands—ay, and hearts too—would dwindle in such a cause. Promise me to think no more of Taske. I know that is a sore subject, but oh, Ray! her father's a madman."

A madman! Taske was indeed a sore subject. Ray had utterly set his heart upon balancing

accounts with a wretched stroller in open defiance. He could not at once admit a rival to Taske, even in a madman; nor could he without difficulty substitute an unknown woman for an object so full of interest, in cause and effect, as the Druish violin.

"Come and let's talk it over," said Ray soothingly. "Come to the goods-shed."

But still Paul hung back unconvinced, his keen anxiety detecting Taske as a scent of danger lingering in the air. He himself had lost so little time that he declared himself, by word and manner, still reeling, unable yet to face the danger coolly. The very idea of lingering was danger, towering like a mountain over all other considerations, and to be surmounted with the utmost wings of language. The manager might urge in self-defence that Mr. Stepney had his business to attend to. Nobody heeded his words, and, compared with that mountain, his very presence counted for no more than a factory unseen on the far side.

An act of restitution seems commonplace honesty, but there may be a far side of circumstance that makes this commonplace heroic. Here we see a young lady, and a certain article of great value that has come to her father's hands, in the way of business. She knows that the

Druish violin was stolen, and she knows its immense significance to Mr. Druish. In her father's absence she restores the stolen property to its rightful owners. You may belittle this honesty, you may say the police were coming, that the young lady knew it, and more than suspected her father to be in their way. Granted. But suppose she loved the man—this Druish!—it snatched the breath into awe as sharply as the air of any peak breathing high above the clouds. She gave it up, her heart's desire's hostage, to the man she loved, and bade him carry it away where she could never follow, beyond the bars of policy into freedom.

All this Paul Druish explained with terrible earnestness, unconscious of its bearing upon himself, conscious only of its bearing upon Eunice; and when he had listened, Ray Stepney did not wait for another appeal; he took down his hat from its peg and declared himself ready.

At one end of the great goods-shed a pyramid of cases was being discharged from a two-horse trolley backed into a stone bay. Three or four stalwart men laughed and shouted incessantly as they laboured with their stalwart building material, sorting their cubes and oblongs in geometric figures on the pavement; but to the other end of the shed they were only a party of



children playing with bricks—Ray Stepney and his friend did not notice them at all as disturbers of privacy.

Ray had consented to sacrifice his own inclinations to friendship, not to the softer emotions, whose victim the friend seemed to be. As a pillow compared with a steel spring, so were the softer emotions compared with Stepney. He bitterly regretted their presence, especially after learning what had happened. It was requisite that he should know how matters stood, and in the urgency of the case even a pathetic little letter from Eunice, that would otherwise have been most sacredly confidential, was exhibited to furnish data for action. A sore trial, a bitter trial patience found it to hear of measures taken against a defiant thief redounding to the rebel's advantage, while retaliation was interdicted by the bare word "love." The steel spring strained to launch itself against Taske, whose defiance had wound it up. Eunice's presence, had it been visible, bodily, in all its charm, instead of lying remote, overshadowed by danger, could never for one moment have competed with Taske in his triumphant monopoly of Stepney's regard.

The facts of the case were easy enough to piece together and to grasp. When Underhill went out into all the watchful shadows conjured up

by Stepney's zeal, they followed him almost to a shadow, leaving the house unguarded. Then Taske, who had been lurking, shadowing the shadows in fear and trembling, but unable to leave a spot so sacred to his son's interest—this was his opportunity. Seeing the coast clear, parental enthusiasm drew him on to enter the house. The house held no danger for him ; if he was seen there, he had only to say that he came for his violin. But he was not seen. While Eunice and Paul Druish were lost in one another in the sitting-room, Taske's cat-like tread found out the workshop, found a steel trunk under the bed, and a key in a bulky waistcoat that shrouded a bedpost.

Had it not been for Stepney, he would have received the counterfeit instrument prepared to impose upon him. Taske's success stung doubly : with pique, and a sense of guilt that overpowered Druish's eloquence, and furnished present haste with an ulterior object—leisure to settle old scores.

"Imagine !" exclaimed Paul, turning from side to side upon pictures of ever blacker import—"imagine this wild beast, Underhill, lashing the sides of his patience with desperate confidence in the fidelity of his copy ! He forbade me the house, but he gave his daughter

no word of blame for what she had done; not one single sign did he grant to his knowledge that the instrument she had given me was a counterfeit; there he sat, waiting in grim, terrible, absolute silence to hear that his copy had passed inspection. We can appreciate the violence of his silence when we see how it is shattered. I wrote to tell him that failure could not change me, that I had enough in my own right to maintain both him and his daughter tolerably. And you see what she replies: that he is mad. Nothing but curses, curses, curses on me and mine; and at an hour's notice he has gone."

"To find Taske, probably," observed Stepney hopefully. "We'll catch the fox before he catches the hare."

VIII

HARMONICS

How different the true nature is from the aspect of pity! Dyce Underhill was insane; but could you pity him if you knew the hard, fierce cause of his madness? And yet—no, no—Pity is always right. Dip deep enough, and her wells always yield truth. The fault lay not in pitying him so much, but in not pitying his daughter more. He, poor old pagan, had received a cruel wrong deep down, at the other end of a long life, and followed the name of its perpetrator with vengeance. Something Eastern in his nature gave the word pulses, his pulses, and dressed it in his habit; he *was* enmity to all that suggested Druish; they were opposed principles, like life and death, held apart for a while—by Kismet, if the old man's Orientalism went so far—for a purpose that came to light in the opposite quarter. The thrifty West clashed with the passionate East in an idea of retaliation ultra-practical. Underhill held the

command of Druish's fortune; he could have destroyed it irrevocably, and probably meant to do so, when a light in his daughter's face inspired him with the idea of using his power, not against another family, but for the benefit of his own. He would link his daughter with Druish, and make the fortune hers.

So far so good. But Eunice loved the man; it was a love light that inspired the luminous idea; she loved Paul Druish, and wished him to have all the advantage.

Underhill never understood, or pretended to understand, his daughter. His ideal woman was a monument of villainy and injustice over his sister's grave. By virtue of her sex Eunice could not be called, either for or against, any question that occupied the great High Court of Expediency. But at least she knew the risk she incurred in placing the Druish violin unreservedly in the hands of its rightful owners—instant annihilation; it must have been quite a surprise when, as the sole alternative possible to a man of his nature, her father took the matter very quietly.

Eunice drew encouragement from the calm. If she had actually done as her fears suggested, and placed Paul Druish utterly out of her sphere, thus ruining her father's masterpiece, he would

have been furious. Possessed by the one idea of making a fortune compensate for a moral wrong, he would have raged like a tempest against obstacles, and torn them up and shattered all that stood.

The explanation of his silence shattered him. Fate had mocked him; his work was all in vain. A useless counterfeit made to impose upon a thief had been given to Druish, and the real magic instrument stolen back by the strolling vagabond, who had left it for repairs, unwittingly in the hands most intimately connected with its story. Fate had mocked him. Without magic, who could have told the counterfeit from the true? The thief, too, must be magical, a strolling foreigner, who had stolen he knew not what. To him the Druish Strad was a question of tone, of fame to his son, perhaps, but only through the medium of skill, and all that made the greatness of the past apparently never entered his comprehension.

Underhill not only felt himself to be pitted against magic, to be denuded of vengeance, denuded of compensation, but he was poor; every movement was clogged and turned to a convulsive effort by poverty. Mocked, derided, confronted with the impossible, for some years he struggled on at a dreadful cost of wear and



tear. Madness drove, all other things restrained. Goaded by the lash, with every step hampered and curbed by want of means, Eunice followed her father through the stress and the storm all the way from Australia to Germany. Too late. Harder and harder, from port to port, wherever music was taught, thither they had to beat against wind and tide, searching always in vain. The end came as to a vessel hopelessly wrecked, driving on to shoals, and dying hard.

An old man and his daughter had then been living for some little time in one of those retired nooks past which the tumult of London swirls without entering. The young lady did not catch a hasty glance, as her father did; she was very pale and retiring, but patient and brave, strong for a purpose, knowing herself to be her father's protector. He was a mere shadow of what he had been; infirm, silent, broken, the one link that still held him among the interests of the living was a habit of wandering stealthily about quiet squares and gardens, watching. When his daughter had gone to work he would come to life. It was a terrible sight to see him raise his head, listening, and prepare to walk as if the grave had opened. More terrible, perhaps, to see his smile in the glass, the bitterness of its greeting to decay. Yes, eyes might wonder, but hands could

avail nothing against this tottering, quavering, bloodless, infirm shadow; it was a heavy disguise, but a safe one.

In the evening the old man would walk out with his daughter, leaning upon her shoulder and on his staff, the white drift of a great beard smothering his breast, and listless eyes lost in the dim lights and shadows of the pavément. Wherever there was music, or a likelihood of finding street musicians, he liked his steps to be led, not voluntarily, and for no perceptible purpose; but his kind protector sympathised with the instinct that drew him that way, and with the sigh that he sometimes drew when the music was loudest. She would take the hand that had shown a sign of life, and try to press the warmth of her love into it, and speak to it of bright things as it drew on, on, mechanically on, to find another disappointment.

One holiday afternoon, when the parks were full, and the roads outside comparatively empty, the pair were walking thus, his hand in hers. The rigid joints and bars of the old hand stood in the two earnest, womanly ones like a piece of inert machinery. These did not possess its secret, but earnestly tried, unmindful of passing observation that would once have set them in a flutter, before they were worn by the need of strength and courage.

Trees that are first to catch the meaning of Spring were but just beginning to admit here and there the possibility of an emerald dawn; all but evergreens looked either browner than ever, or in act to draw the gauzes of the young year about their limbs, gossamer veils, indeed, but the first thought of full-fledged life—a garment. In this light they presented themselves to Eunice, and by this train of thought she was led to try the buds upon her father. Could not the name of Spring kindle a spark of life? She fancied the gnarled old hand seemed to wake, as if its secret spring was touched, and she pressed it the closer, and persevered in the hope of winning her reply. It did wake, the gnarled old bough that only slept; life stirred and thrilled towards the warm light.

From behind a clump of evergreens, towards which they were moving slowly, came the twanging prelude of a harp scarcely heard in the noise of children at play. Poor devoted Eunice! the secret of her father's hand flashed upon her too late, with the wail of a harsh string drawn out through many dislocated joints as they rounded the clump of evergreens. Providentially, the recoil, the lightning leap of the spring as it flew from her side, flung her to the ground—as if the truth had struck her with its lightning;

of the manner in which her fears were vindicated, she knew nothing.

There was a shriek and a wild scatter, and a young gentleman, who had been thoughtfully clouding the scene with cigar smoke from a neighbouring seat, became aware of tragedy at his feet enacted upon the person of a little old German-looking fiddler.

He was very prompt. Before half a life had been crushed and beaten out, his arms were round the assailant. Other helping hands followed readily enough, and, in less time than can be written, Dyce Underhill was pinned flat to the ground, straining and raging in the grasp of a dozen men.

The long arm of London took possession, evolved all requisites as if they had been waiting, and readjusted regular movement like a clock-maker.

"I suppose you'll want our addresses, as witnesses? When is the trial?" asked the prompt young gentleman, sending a glance of pity with two charitable sisters who were bearing off a half-conscious figure in a cab.

Next moment he swung round sharply again in the crowd, having caught a word that precluded the idea of a trial. The nearest member of the X. fraternity, who had uttered it, was

kneading and shaping away at the plastic masses encroaching round the central group like limp dough. The walls required unremitting attention, and still stood badly, until something like a wave swept curiosity backwards, and held it, as an iron ring, at a respectful distance.

It was true. As the prompt inquirer turned, even as he looked, the grey head before him became a weight; a mighty effort heaved the ponderous old hands, almost imperceptibly, first at the wrists, then at the finger-tips, collapsed under the long, slow, pitiful strain, and sank to rest—the one rest possible. It was a piteous sight; but the person who had been not only an actor, but a spectator of the whole scene and its environs, found his pity straying on in the wake of the cab, in which two grey-veiled sisters of the Druish Orphanage were being sisters indeed.

The injured fiddler was borne off by his trembling associate, or bore him off; for to say the truth, the harp was in the worse case by far, in spite of injuries. Indomitable was the courage of the fiddler. He could scarcely speak, but his was the tongue that supplied the police with all necessary information. When they collected the remains of his instrument, shattered upon his assailant, he begged them to desist,

declaring with a queer cracked ring of triumph that he never need play in the street—never more. The rescuer, to whose promptness he undoubtedly owed his life, felt instinctively attracted by the little man's great pluck, and found himself trying to catch the broken faint words, and peering into the yellow face battered out of all recognition.

When he had been forced to take his departure, by unsatisfied public curiosity turning upon him, the young gentleman found himself still dwelling upon this fiddler far more than upon the huge stiffening frame he had seen last. Beneath the Marble Arch he consulted his watch and found an appointment, but still that yellow face—*en route* for black and blue—stood before it. In a secluded Oxford Street he was forced to stop before a barred jeweller's window, and refer to a face of very different complexion that smiled at him in youth and beauty from a private locket. Golden locks and a pearly smile, appropriately framed in pearl and gold, restored his business-like equanimity, and he looked round for a 'bus bound for Nineveh, on the other side of St. Paul's. The city might have been Nineveh, so far as 'buses were concerned just then. The young gentleman walked on again towards renewed distractions peopling the tombs of Hol-

born with ghosts of fiddlers. Business inspired by beauty suffered so much that its votary had just decided upon a cab, when he met a substantial spectre turning a corner, and business saw stars.

"Druish!"

"Glad to find you have left enough of me to recognise," responded Druish, picking up his hat.

His friend looked at him attentively, with an eye to traces of mental rather than of corporeal collision; then drew him eagerly along, and without preface plunged into a narrative of the tragedy he had just witnessed. The scene might have furnished matter for a mile, but within fifty yards Druish pulled up short, asked one question, and seized the narrator's arm with a grasp of the whole subject.

"I must go to her, Ray," he exclaimed wildly. "At once. She is alone."

"Of course," said his friend, in a tone of the fullest comprehension. "But don't try to see her for a day or two. It will be enough if she hears of it in time for the funeral. Don't hurry her, Druish; you cannot possibly lose her this time, you know."

Druish shook his head, and muttered quickly in a half-whisper—

"I don't know. I never told her. I never said a word."

"Oh, bosh!—with *your* eyes!" responded his friend reassuringly. "I'll wager the only bar between you lies *down*, out there. And you were right, old man, he was mad—horribly mad, and so— Arrange for bestowing it in the kindest asylum for such a case as soon as we have just inquired at the Convent. I know where she is. Let's hail this hansom."

Ray Stepney's practicable cheerfulness was infectious. It meant to be infectious; it took the lead in all that had to be done, shrinking from nothing, but arguing ultimate sunshine from the clouds. Paul Druish followed, taking comfort in the potent magic that had changed a reticent, dissatisfied youth into a capable, determinate manhood.

"And what are you doing now?" he asked, rousing himself after an interval of silence to watch his friend—"Africa?"

Mr. Stepney's face suggested unlimited travelling, but his attire was not that of a budding explorer. He cut short a tour of Druish's studio, and for a moment looked fixedly at a pipe with which he was prefacing dinner.

"After we parted in Australia to search two ways for this young lady whom Fate has just thrown into our hands, *I* got as far as Melbourne." Here the speaker paused abruptly, meditated

over a mouthful of smoke, expelled it with a short laugh, and looked a complete confession. "You may forgive me, Paul, now, since now I can even forgive myself for my breach of contract. And you are just as bad. Here are works that have penetrated the world's pickle market, and now I see the why and wherefore that has produced them from your hand—all these works of art. It could only end this way, could it? pending the downfall of barriers."

"Works of art indeed!" repeated Druish, glancing significantly towards the end of the watch-chain that was tucked affectionately into his friend's waistcoat.

Stepney exhibited the locket blushing, with luminous comments.

"Only got back last week. Oh! youngest daughter of our Melbourne agent; not bad, is it? Of course I should have looked you up. Drafting like mad, my boy; this wretched daub can give you no conception."

The young man regretted his incoherent triumph by the light of his solitary efforts at the dinner-table. He endeavoured to whet the defective appetite upon golden prospects extending far beyond love. Druish was a name rising to celebrity in art, but it was more than that. Practically, for Druish, two birds had been killed

with one stone, two barriers were removed ; for since this poor old maniac was Underhill, the man he had half killed must needs be Taske.

At the name of the Druish violin Druish interposed with a decisive "Stop !" He looked round his solitary room as if he feared to see barriers already rising between him and its picture-starred walls presided over by a female head, elaborately painted, but by no means in his best style.

"But surely ancestral honours and glories beckon you back to Safington. No? Well, at least you will give *her* a say in it, surely?" persisted the astute young man of business, unhesitatingly pointing to the portrait of a woman he had never seen.

"Not even her," said Druish firmly.

"But why? Safington belongs to the Druish Strad, and fortune throws the wretched thief into your power. Why not try at least to get it out of him?"

Druish looked again at his pictures, and shuddered slightly, remembering how severely they had already suffered in this cause.

"Because it would spoil the moral of the story," he answered, and changed the subject.

Immortal hands were drawing the story to a close, in spite of obstacles. For her father's

Like Eunice wished to forget that he had so bitterly cursed the name of Druish. Was it not madness? Had he not cursed Paul? Why remember the want of reason that had beaten its bars against her life? A horrible, unfilial relief—positive relief in the last hope of a tangled mind—indeed, every thought of her father's hatred robbed her of sorrow for his death. And yet the hatred was there, and the sorrow was there, in effect; they lived as obstacles, nameless but strong, that sufficiently taxed each sinew of self-defence. Reinforced by a sense of disparity, they might have proved insuperable, for Eunice was constitutionally liable to self-sacrifice. She dwelt upon the advantages of Paul's position and the shortcomings of her own, magnifying even this difference to the stars, for the sake of the splendid bewilderment it gave her as the gauge of his affection. She knew she ought to repudiate, for its own sake, this enormous declension through the haze of infinity. It was wonderful; admiration and conscientious scruples bid and out-bid each other till both were tired. If the Druish violin had been captured and sent back to solitary confinement at Safington for the aggrandisement of nothing but miserliness, Paul must have been involved in the process. A fortune and a title insisting upon the use of his shoulders, must

have destroyed the balance of Eunice's mind ; for artists were comparatively everyday people to her, but baronets of Safington creatures of another sphere.

Now, without troubling his head with these considerations, Paul Druish, the artist, having already won his way through the initial difficulties of his career, felt no inclination to turn aside. He never even mentioned his family heirloom to Eunice ; it had so often threatened him with total eclipse, that his inveteracy against it might have suggested nothing but darkness, here, too, in its very name.

Enough for both if only those obstacles could be surmounted. Many days, many weeks were devoted with tender thrift to the power that alone could surmount them. When Eunice felt the weight of her father's menaces, Paul said, "Think of the living ;" and when humility threatened frost in a sense of duty, "Don't think of yourself at all," he said ; "let me think for you," for there was the natural home of her advantage.

Eunice feared to advance ; but the hardship of her position was so much solid ground of argument to her lover, in which he represented the pressure of time.

"Just think how an artist suffers !" he urged humorously. "He cannot keep away from

you, or enjoy one easy hour in your absence, and two hours of precious daylight every day he must waste between this asylum and his studio!"

Here was an argument that crowned self-sacrifice with roses; and one morning in the height of summer, when London was empty, a venerable archdeacon, late of Lockthorpe, performed the quietest of quiet services, a whisper of a wedding in a cave of a church. Ray Stepney was best man, and having participated in the groom's feelings, completed his course by giving the bride away. The bridesmaid was a celebrated actress, and two charitable sisters formed the audience. An undercurrent of emotion in the service made these charitable ladies wonder, and they noticed that after the briefest of absences the wedding-party returned from the vestry without either the bridesmaid or the clergyman. What happened behind the closed door, no one knew; but as if to enhance the slight interest of such a wedding, report subsequently declared that the archdeacon and his daughter met there for the first time after years of estrangement.

Many bare canvases received their destined lives, and round the easel was forming the history

of a home — forming like music in the same influence that had made the first moon sweet, and all moonlight ever after eloquent of the kind fact that some one's honeymoon is shining. Many fancies found their sunshine there, and ripened to carry warmth abroad. Children and friends could never have passed empty-hearted from such a home; they must have carried of its abundance into the world, or else have been mere sieves, for even strangers who happened just to dip in were the better for it.

Among these mere grace-notes of intercourse, as time went on, was a young man who had already charmed half Europe with his playing. At his first appearance in London Paul Druish was present, and never did a thoughtfuller person leave a concert. He thought of the young interpreter incessantly, and the upshot was that a few select friends, among whom was Raymond Stepney, of Stepney & Son (Stepney & Grandson would have sounded more significant just then), were invited to meet Herr Taske, the coming violinist.

Ray Stepney met him with red face, blurt-ing abruptly, "Is your father living?" and glowered at him uneasily between the courses. The rest of the company found him uninteresting. What was there to interest in a young

man who, when he came, brought with him barely sufficient English to ascribe his success principally to the superexcellence of his fiddle, who slipped into a "Nein" in reply to a hasty question, and stumbled over "No more since"?

Evidently his tongue was locked up in a brass-bound case in the drawing-room, and when he rejoined it, and consented to favour the company in return for the great honour and the pleasure of "Mr. Druce kindness," even Ray Stepney forgot to feel inquisitive then, for while Herr Taske played there did not seem to be room beneath the heavens for one thought of either the man or his instrument.

THE END

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